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PlayStation®
The Official Magazine

Issue 057 April 2012

19 PS VITA LAUNCH GAMES REVIEWED!

10 GREAT PS3 GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

PlayStation – The Official Magazine Issue 57 (April 2012)

Journey into darkness

FAR CRY 3

Fighting for survival in PS3's next great openworld game

REVIEWED

Twisted Metal | Journey

The Darkness II | MLB 2K12

UFC Undisputed 3 | SSX

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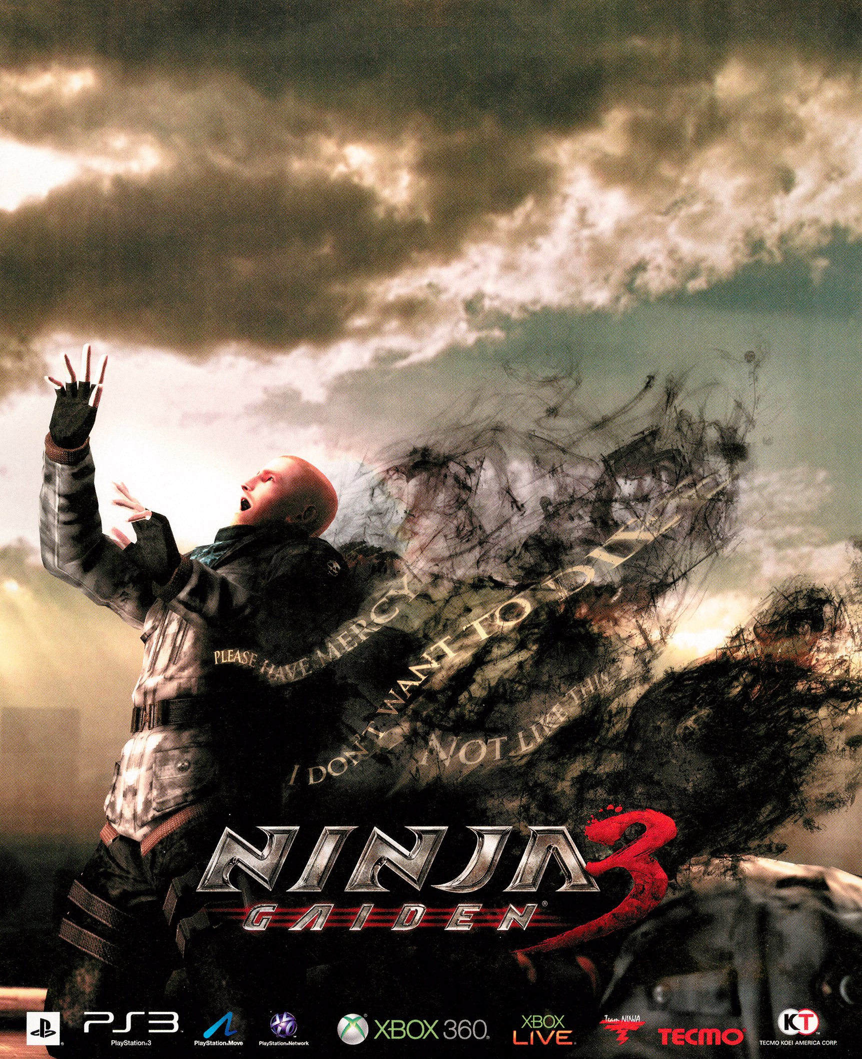

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APRIL 2012

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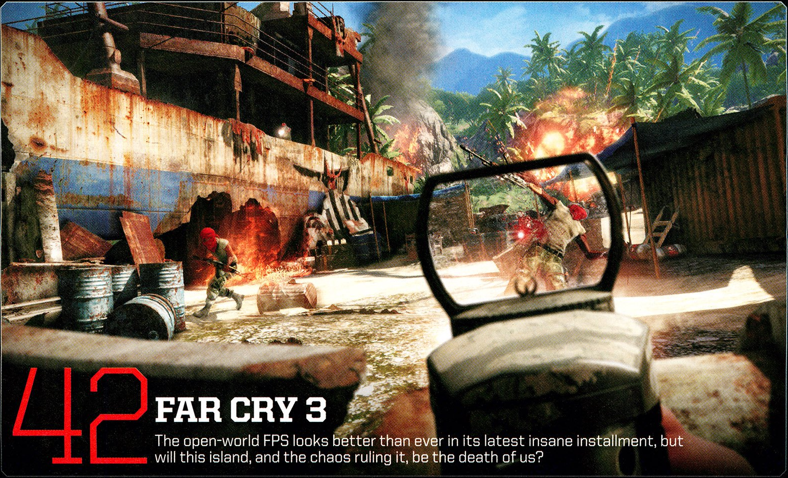

42 FAR CRY 3

The open-world FPS looks better than ever in its latest insane installment, but will this island, and the chaos ruling it, be the death of us?

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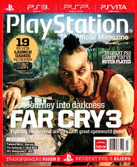
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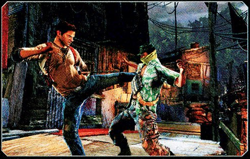

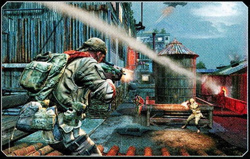

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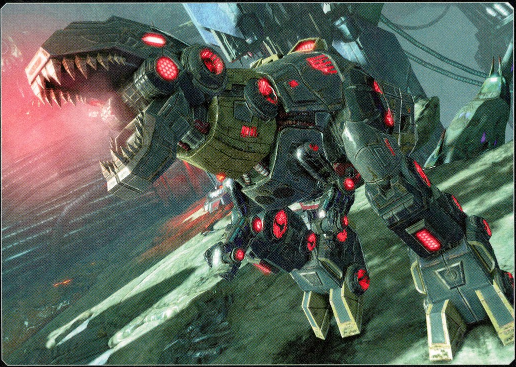

26 TRANSFORMERS: FALL OF CYBERTRON
The war for Cybertron has ripped the planet apart as Autobots and Decepticons duke it out. Who will come out on top in the battle of the machines?

72 TWISTED METAL
Sweet, sweet road rage takes to the mean streets of online multiplayer.

Christmas in March

Where did all these review games come from?!

For a good portion of my career, I oversaw the reviews section for the various magazines I worked on. Even when I was simply a guy who liked to play videogames (no *Pong* jokes, please) they were my favorite reads. Which is why I'm blown away that we have a total of 36 game reviews in this issue!

Nineteen of the reviews are PS Vita launch games. It's been a challenge evaluating the flood of Vita titles, and as expected the lineup's a mix of awesome, average, and "Aww, why bother?" But as a whole, the Vita's game stable is exceptionally strong—especially when you consider the high profile games yet to come in the next few weeks.

FIFA Soccer was the big surprise for me as I've been a longtime sports gamer, but its been difficult to find time for my "athletic" pursuits as I've gotten older and my life more hectic. Playing *FIFA* on Vita gives me every bit the enjoyment I derive from it on PS3, and now it's easy to sneak in a game when a moment of solitude crops up. I can't wait for the Vita version of *MLB: The Show* to arrive so I can continue my sports comeback.

Of our 17 other reviews this issue, I humbly point out my lead review of *Twisted Metal*. Because of print mag deadline factors, I've actually read some other reviewers' opinions on the game and there seems to be a contingent that damn the game for being true to its identity. To which I say: You're wrong.

But that's the great thing about reviews. They serve as a launching point and an opportunity for great discussions. So whether you agree or disagree with my *Twisted Metal* review—or any of our other reviews—let us know what you think.

Roger Burchill
Editor in Chief
twitter.com/RogerPTOM

Ken Bousquet
Art Director
twitter.com/ArtKenPTOM

People are always saying "beware the Ides of March." But you know what they tell the Ides of March? Beware Ken Bousquet. If there's one thing he hates, it's ides.

Scott Butterworth
Associate Editor
twitter.com/ScottPTOM

Scott Butterworth once told his neighbors, "If it's too loud, you're too old!" He then continued to run a jackhammer in his living room. The retirement home was not pleased.

Ryan Taljonick
Assistant Editor
twitter.com/RyanTaljonick

"Don't worry, be happy," is Ryan Taljonick's personal motto. Strangely, he usually says this while clenching his teeth and slamming his hands on his desk.

Anne Lewis
Assistant Editor
twitter.com/BDRAnneLewis

When someone told Anne Lewis, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em," she took the advice to heart. That's how she ended up as our new Assistant Editor. Boy, is she screwed.

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EDITORIAL
Editor in Chief Roger Burchill
Associate Editor Scott Butterworth
Assistant Editor Ryan Taljonick
Assistant Editor Anne Lewis
Editorial Contributors Matt Cabral, Erick Ceil, James Coates, Richard Cobbett, Taylor Cocke, Hollander Cooper, Jason D'Aprile, Andrew Groen, Andrew Hayward, Alex Johnson, Nathan Meunier, Mikel Reparaz, Paul Semel, Evan Shamoon, David F. Smith, Kimberley Wallace

ART
Art Director Ken Bousquet
Designer Elizabeth Marken
Creative Director Chris Imlay

BUSINESS
Vice President, Media Ursula Morgan
umorgan@futureus.com
Publisher Kristen Salvatore
ksalvatore@futureus.com
Vice President, Sales & Business Development Nate Hunt
nhunt@futureus.com
National Director of Sales Isaac Ugay
iugay@futureus.com
Sales Director, East Coast Thomas Lundell
tlundell@futureus.com
Regional Sales Manager Brandon Wong
brandonwong@futureus.com
Regional Sales Manager Stacy Gaines
sgaines@futureus.com
Regional Sales Manager Jen Doerger
jdoerger@futureus.com
Advertising Coordinator Heidi Hapin
hhapin@futureus.com

Marketing & Sales Development Director Rhoda Bueno
eCommerce & Fulfillment Director Lisa Radler
Consumer Marketing Director Stephanie Blake
Newsstand Director Bill Shewey

PRODUCTION
Production Director Michael Hollister
Production Manager Larry Briseno
Production Coordinator Jose Urrutia
Print Order Coordinator Linh Chau-Ward

FUTURE US, Inc.
4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400
South San Francisco, CA 94080
(650) 872-1642
www.futureus.com

Chief Operating Officer Rachelle Considine
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FUTURE PLC
30 Monmouth St., Bath, Avon, BA1 2BW, England
Tel +44 1225 442244
www.futureplc.com

Non-Executive Chairman Peter Allen
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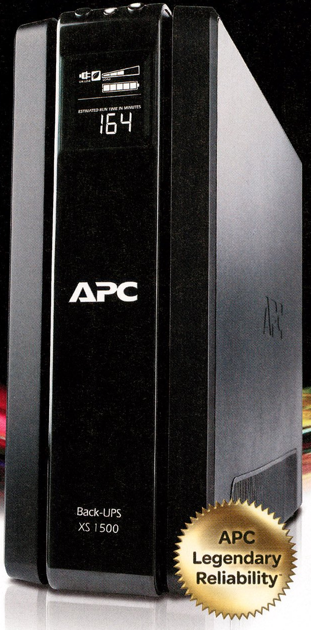

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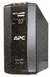

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Inside Qore Episode 47

Spellcasting 101

Cast a spell in *Sorcery*, a game made for the motion-based controls of the PlayStation Move. Battle enormous monsters and solve clever puzzles with a wave (or flick) of your hand. Then, head to the islands of *Risen 2* in a quest to infiltrate a band of scurvy pirates. You'll learn the finer points of sailing, swashbuckling, and grog mixing. Trade the pirate patch for a high-tech augmented reality scope in *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier*. Before you deploy, use the Gunsmith feature to customize the weapon of your dreams. Finally, shape-shift through the open world of New York Zero in *Prototype 2*. Become the master of your mutations and use them to exact revenge.

JESSE BLAZE SNIDER HOST OF QORE

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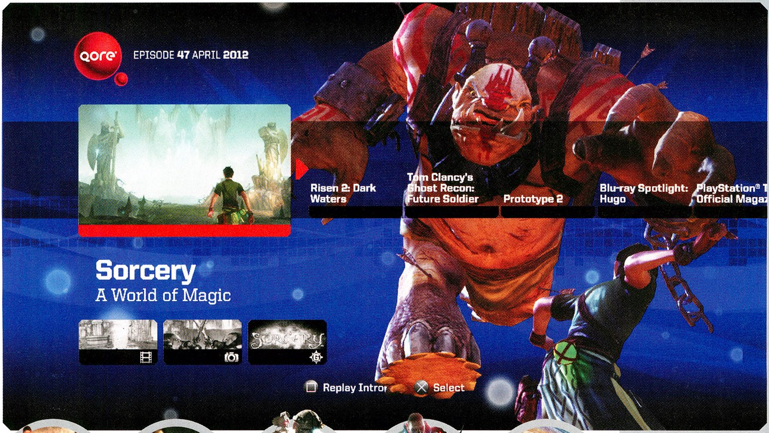
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Risen 2: Dark Waters
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier
Prototype 2
Blu-ray Spotlight: Hugo
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A World of Magic
Replay Intro
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Sorcery
PlayStation Move grants magical powers.

Risen 2: Dark Waters
It's a rum-filled, piratey sequel.

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier
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Prototype 2
Urban shape-shifter out for revenge.

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Hugo dazzles in 3D.

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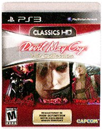
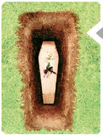


03

Devil in Red
Silver-haired Dante returns and is rockin' it harder than ever in *Devil May Cry HD Collection.*

04

Avengers Assemble!
With the *Avengers* movie just a few short months away, we hope Robert Downey Jr. is taking it easy on his birthday.



06

Plan Your Epitaph Day
Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today...wait, epitaphs are the things we hear at weddings, right?

08

Easter
We're not convinced a bipedal rabbit delivers candy unto our homes, but Easter *does* mean the gas station down the street has Cadbury Crème Eggs, so it is easily the greatest thing to happen ever.

10

It's the Hot Pants?
In 2006 *The Guinness Book of World Records* named Lara Croft the industry's "most successful heroine."

In stores: *Sniper Elite V2*

13

Larry, Curly, and Oh No
We may be wary of *The Three Stooges* remake, but that won't stop us from heading out to see it. Who knows? It could be.. decent.

14

"X" is the Loneliest Letter
As none of us actually have ex-spouses we aren't sure how to go about celebrating Ex-Spouse Day.

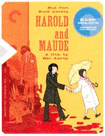
15

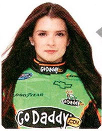
Emma Watson
22-year-old Emma Watson has cast a spell on our hearts and also made it so we can't move our legs. Send help?

17

Harold and Maude on Blu-ray
Harold and Maude taught us love knows no age. That's why Ryan just announced his engagement to a 90-year-old backgammon champion.

In stores: *Disgaea 3: Absence of Detention (PS Vita)*





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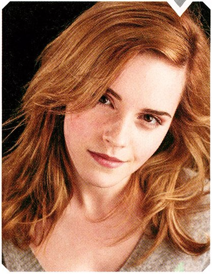
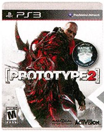
Go Dani!
On this date in 2008, Danica Patrick became the first female driver to win an Indy car race at the Indy Japan 300.





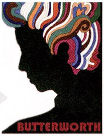
24

Prototype 2
Those of us who dislike Alex Mercer will love hunting his sorry butt down with *Prototype 2*'s release today.

In stores: *Risen 2: Dark Waters*

26

Scott's Birthday
It's that time again. Our dear, sweet Scott Butterworth is another year older and is demanding a tribute. This time he wants music. Someone write him a song.



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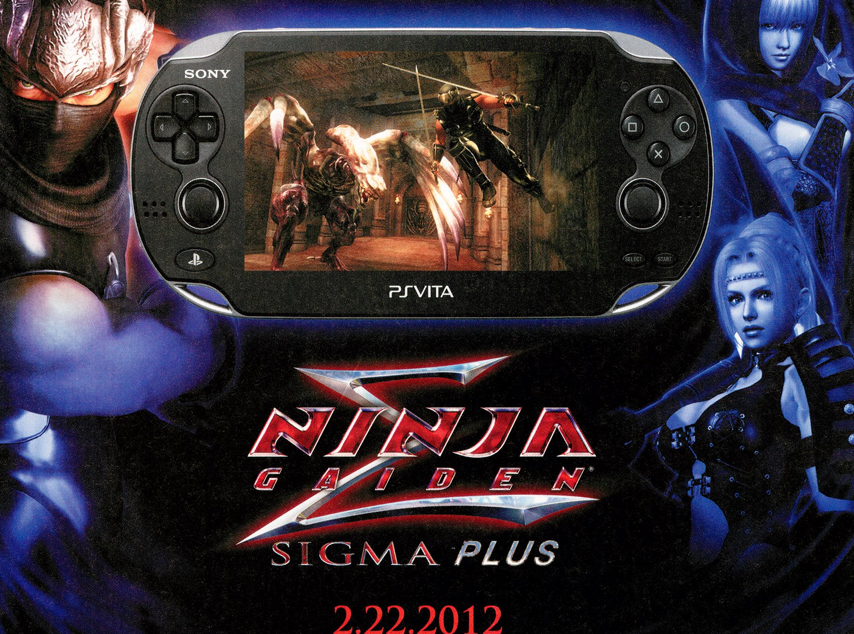

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The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

Reavers Return
We interview *Mass Effect 3's* Casey Hudson about the finale.

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Karateka
Prince of Persia creator Jordan Mechner returns to his roots.

⏩Page 16

Healing Power
Read about a game designed to build strength in cancer patients.

⏩Page 18

Fatal Fanboys
DmC devs receive death threats for changing Dante's looks. WTF?!

⏩Page 20

Vita FAQ
Get all the answers to your burning Vita questions.

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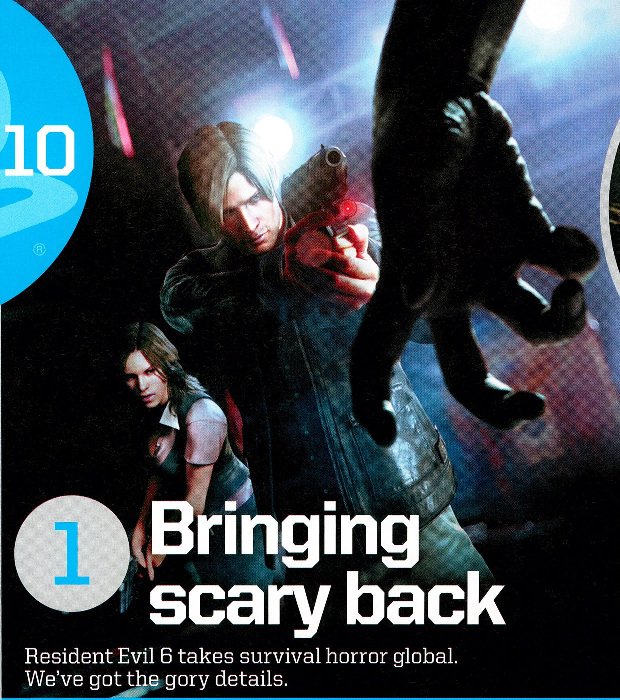


1 Bringing scary back

Resident Evil 6 takes survival horror global. We've got the gory details.

Three years after its undead safari, *Resident Evil* is back with a bang...and loads of living-impaired denizens. The headline news? *Resident Evil 6* is coming November 20 of this year. *RE4's* Leon S. Kennedy returns. There's a proper cover system. Oh, and there's even rumored to be six-player co-op. We love the smell of multiple playable protagonists in the morning.

If the fifth entry in the iconic survival horror series was merely a polished follow up to its predecessor, then *RE6* appears to be throwing all the zombie guts at the wall. We're really hoping it sticks. At any rate, with six major characters, a global *28 Days*-inspired infection, and controls cribbed from some of PS3's best shooters, a lack of ambition isn't something we'd level at this undead fella.

Terrifying Tales

Interestingly, it looks like Capcom is trying to blend the series' older values with the most recent game's high-octane action and frenetic crowd control. Set in a U.S. town called Tall Oaks—which sports a distinctly Raccoon City vibe—Leon's storyline seems to be the scariest of the trailer's three plot strands. With 70,000 infected souls on the rampage, our boy's going to need some help, too. Enter new gal pal Helena Harper. A member of the President's security detail, she's suddenly free to partner up with Leon after our Secret Service agent murders her zombified boss.

While Tall Oaks' moodily lit corridors and burning streets have one foot in old-school spooky, the other hoof is set firmly among more recent shooters. A quick glance at Leon breaking out some balletic sliding maneuvers while fighting hordes in a subway tunnel suggests the creaky controls of old have been jettisoned. In their place is a system that's seemingly graduated from the *Vanquish* School of Shooting with first-class honors. How this will marry with the

horror elements remains to be seen, but we hope Capcom can strike a balance between exciting set pieces and proper decomposing-Dobermans-jumping-through-window scares. The possibilities have us shivering with excitement.

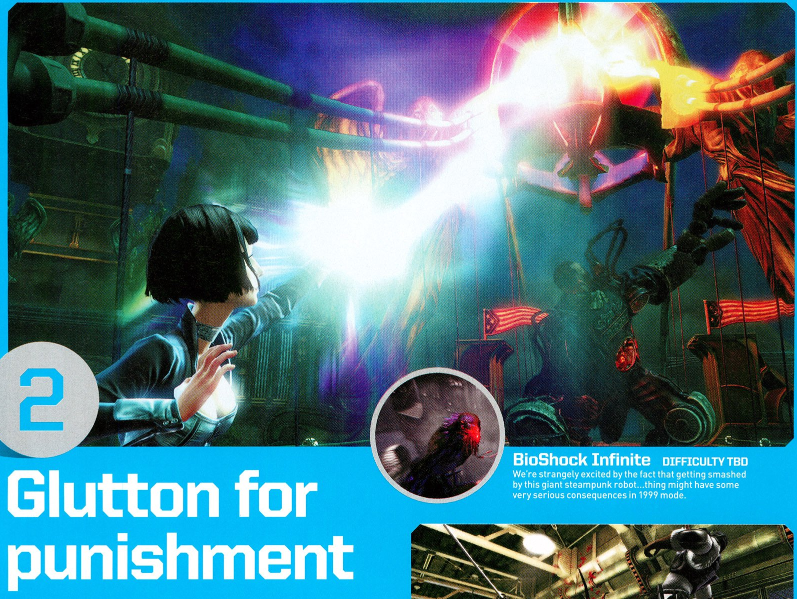
The Buddy System

The trailer then shifts to a Chinese city, heralding the return of Chris Redfield. Last seen in *RE5's* sweltering, shooty African escapades, he and his mighty forearms are taking no prisoners. Check out the footage of him pushing aside a cameraman as he tries to navigate a street filled with fleeing, terrified civilians. There's no sign of *RE5's* Sheva though. Instead, various clips hint that Redfield's supported by a four-man squad.

The final piece of the horrifying puzzle is the debut of a mysterious buzzcut-sporting male, whose on-the-run antics closeout the trailer. Early speculation outs him as Alex Wesker, a man with genes so advanced he's nearly immortal. That would explain the bits where's he's going all *Devil May Cry* Dante on a group of baddies with a gravity-defying brand of keester-kicking. Although he's not such a badass that he won't accept help from a woman companion. We originally thought the blonde seen assisting him was *RE4's* Ashley Graham, but the character's voice actress has now stated she won't be in the game.

Regardless of who she is, Alex's adventure seems to be radically different in tone from Chris and Leon's sections. In fact, we'd say it looks like it's mimicking *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*. A Terminator-esque villain is clearly chasing him and it absolutely won't stop until he's dead...or until it has drained his blood. There are also clips of Alex receiving injections and talking about how the world can have his blood "if it ponies up the dough." Who wants to bet the claret running through his veins is the cure to the worldwide undead epidemic?

It looks like we will see actual zombies this time around. Perhaps Majini will also make an appearance.



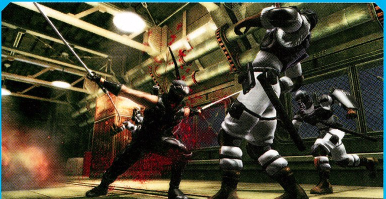
BioShock Infinite **DIFFICULTY TBD**
We're strangely excited by the fact that getting smashed by this giant steampunk robot...thing might have some very serious consequences in 1999 mode.

Glutton for punishment

BioShock Infinite's 1999 mode is tough, but can it top these hardcore experiences?

We can name any number of reasons why we're excited for *BioShock Infinite*—from the stunning world and narrative design to the intense gameplay scenarios—but folks who love games primarily for the challenge now have a new reason to foam at the mouth with anticipation.The game's recently announced (and entirely optional) 1999 mode features "permanent consequences" for gameplay decisions that, according to Irrational Games creative director Ken Levine, can leave players without certain skills as the game progresses, while more tightly allocated resources mean respawning may not always be an option.

BioShock Infinite certainly isn't the first game to test PS3 players' skills (and patience), though. Here are five of the toughest experiences available today (their difficulty noted by our broken-controller rating system), designed for the masochists and trouble-seekers among us. Are you badass enough to tackle them all?



Ninja Gaiden Sigma ●●●○○

What: Tecmo's hack-'n'-slash action revival is already intensely challenging on the standard difficulty setting, but players who laugh in the face of sword-wielding shinobi can bump up to the Master Ninja option for a new kind of torture.

Why: Master Ninja tweaks the Very Hard setting by tossing in stronger enemies in addition to foes that antagonize Ryu Hayabusa during boss fights. Furthermore, the player inventory is tightened, making it hard to rebound from devastating battles.

Dark Souls

●●●●●

What: Like spiritual predecessor *Demon's Souls*, *Dark Souls* doesn't need a special mode or setting to rough fans up. It's an intensely challenging roleplaying experience that requires patience and plenty of trial and error.

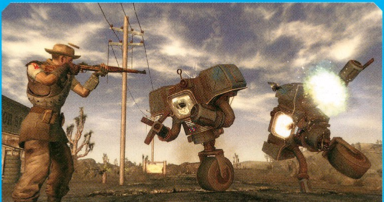
Why: *Dark Souls* isn't in the business of explanations, obvious solutions, or helping hands. Players are nearly on their own in the deep, dark dungeons, forced to battle overpowered foes and avoid unseen traps. It's a grind, but one that can be immensely rewarding for devoted adventurers.

Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

●●●●○

What: Solid Snake's last stealth-based quest makes for a stunning PS3-exclusive experience, though gamers can get through it with plenty of shooting and combat on the lower difficulty levels. Not so on the Boss Extreme setting.

Why: More guards roam the stages in Boss Extreme mode and they feature greatly amplified sight and hearing, so players need to *really* utilize camouflage to make it far. Also, non-lethal rounds aren't for sale, and Snake's health is utterly decimated by enemy gunfire. It's brutal!



Fallout: New Vegas

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What: Dealing with crazies in the post-apocalyptic, open-world setting of New Vegas is stressful enough, though players seeking a more challenging path through this bleak future can enable Hardcore Mode.

Why: In Hardcore Mode, healing items work gradually (and Doctor's Bags only partially heal limbs), ammunition is no longer weightless, and companions aren't safe from an untimely demise. Beyond that, the hero must eat, drink, and sleep regularly to maintain energy. It's just like real life, unfortunately.

Trash Panic

●●●○○

What: Sony's trash-disposal puzzler—a PSN download—puts an odd spin on *Tetris* inside of a trash can but doesn't let players save progress between levels. Not hard enough? Try the appropriately titled Hell mode.

Why: Varied trash flows and tougher bosses means fans should feel lucky to topple the first stage, let alone several. Hell mode requires much more patience and strategy to complete. Be prepared to invest hundreds of continues and dozens of hours to clean up this mess (and snag the Trophy).

3

Casey Hudson

Mass Effect 3's exec producer talks Star Wars, arguments, and ending the trilogy

How has your job changed over three *Mass Effects*?
One thing that's really different is that everything we used to show was 'new'. We had to do a lot of explaining and showmanship just to get people to understand. Once *Mass Effect* came out, people knew what it was—in fact, they could tell us what *ME2* was supposed to be! What I've seen in this last year is an explosion of pop culture excitement about *Mass Effect* as a universe. You go to Comic Con, say, and now there's people dressed up as *ME* characters. To me that's really exciting—just to see the level of dedication in our fans. There's tremendous passion out there.

After eight years, are you sad the trilogy is ending?
We're probably too busy to feel sad it's over right now! I don't think I'll be sad. We're not done yet, and I don't know what the final experience will be, but I'm pretty sure *Mass Effect 3* is the best in the series. We had ambitious goals, but to make a whole series that spans recessions, BioWare's independence, different publishers... Well, we did it in the end.

Is there one moment you could point at and say "that was where we nailed it?"
Whenever we make a game people talk about how much they loved it, but they'll always have a caveat: 'It wasn't perfect.' The thing is, no work is ever perfect—it's certainly not our goal. There's a whole different thing we try to capture, which is simply whether or not you fall in love with it. When you fall in love with a person it's not because they're perfect: it's something else. I think we understand how to make people fall in love with an experience.

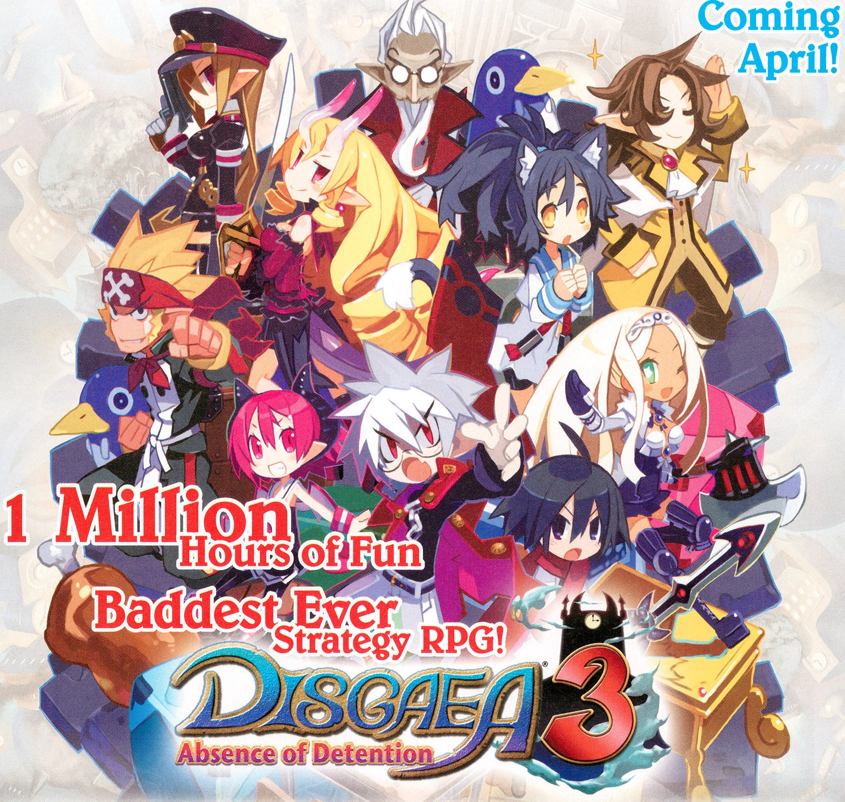
What other ways do you think the series has evolved?
When we started we were still in the previous generation—you have to think about *Knights of the Old Republic's* technology. With the new systems we thought we could get pretty close to being able to read emotion off a character's face, but we didn't know. We didn't want every planet full of aliens because what if you couldn't read a performance off an alien? That's why we made sure we had a reason why humans are everywhere, and at first we also didn't plan romances with aliens as we didn't know if the acting would come across. After *ME* though, there were people who really wanted a romance with a character like Garrus. And it makes sense! If you look at Garrus and the acting... well, he's just alive!

To what extent is *KOTOR* the fourth *Mass Effect*?
Is it like the fifth Beatle? It is, somewhat. This team we're working with now was, to a large degree, on the Star Wars game. We loved where you could make stories that were bigger than you could tell stuck on Earth... but we wanted to do it in our own universe.

What do your teams tend to argue about?
One thing we try to do is understand our own biases; that helps us avoid the adversarial debate. One thing we've debated though, is what kinds of things are valid in terms of an emotional experience. Should we use jealousy and rejection? For example, if we get you to fall in love with a character and let you pursue it... but then you find them with someone else. It's interesting as there are some who say they'd be so mad they'd quit because they love the character, but why can't we do that? If we *didn't* do that we'd be saying this was the endpoint for our medium: that you can simulate certain things, but ultimately these are toys.

Final question: what happens next?
We don't know exactly, but there will be more *Mass Effect* for *Mass Effect* fans, I'm sure...

> "We understand how to make people fall in love with an experience."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Mild Language
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4

Karate re-master

Prince of Persia creator **Jordan Mechner** goes back to the beginning for his new PSN game

Your new game project is remake of your first game, the classic 1984 computer game *Karateka*. Why revisit it?
Over the years I've been lucky to meet the fans of my games and hear them share their favorite memories and experiences. In the case of *Karateka*, I'm often asked why—unlike *Prince of Persia*—there has never been a sequel or a remake. So I'm happy to announce that we've got a remake under way. The simple straight-ahead story and gameplay of *Karateka* makes it perfect for a downloadable arcade game.

Will you remain true to the original's 2D fighting/platforming mechanics or will the new *Karateka* embrace modern 3D sensibilities?
The new *Karateka* is a remake but it's also a reinvention. We're staying true to the story and spirit of the original game, but completely updating the fighting mechanic and visual storytelling. Even though *Karateka* might be considered the original fighting game, I think it's very far from the sensibility of a brawler like *Street Fighter*. It's a love story whose gameplay mechanic happens to be karate.

Will the new game continue the original game's storyline?
The story setup is the same as the original. The warlord Akuma has captured [Princess] Mariko and it's your job to rescue her.

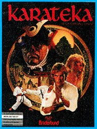
Does the nameless hero get a moniker this time around?
He's Mariko's true love. That's all we need to know. For the original game I got a lot of inspiration from Kurosawa films, Japanese woodblock prints, early Disney animation, and silent movies; the use of strong gestures and framing to show the characters' emotions, so that the story is clear without a word being spoken.

The original was noted for its great story, animation, and control despite limited technology. Basically, you over-delivered. Can you recapture the magic?
Back in the 1980s when I made the first *Karateka* and *Prince of Persia*, just having recognizable human characters that moved smoothly on the screen was a technical breakthrough. Today, it's taken for granted, so a game has to stand out in other ways. For *Karateka*, it's the combination of simple, fun, addictive gameplay with a relatable human story...all set in this cinematic, atmospheric world of medieval Japan.

***Prince of Persia* console games have received the full big-budget retail SKU treatment. Is there a difference in your approach working on a downloadable game?**
Obviously we don't have the kind of resources that we had on *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*. But the flip side is, it frees us to work in a very light, spontaneous, creative way, without the marketing pressures that accompany a successful triple-A franchise. Going small and indie gave me the freedom to take bigger creative risks with *Karateka*, to experiment with gameplay and art direction and make a game that's really different.

How will you measure the new *Karateka*'s success?
There's a moment on every game—it's finally done, it's released, it's gone out into the world and it's too late to change anything. I have nothing special to do, I could watch a DVD or go to the movies, but instead I play the game, just for the hell of it...and I find myself compelled to continue. Even though I've played it a million times, I'm actually having fun and I don't want to stop. I've been lucky enough to experience that moment a few times in my career. If I feel it on *Karateka*, then I've succeeded.

You have the unique perspective of someone who's been developing games for nearly 30 years. What's different now? What remains the same?
When I started on the Apple II, games were sold on 5.25-inch floppy disks in Zip-Loc bags at computer stores. There was no Internet. What happened next was an incredible, once-in-a-lifetime, technological and cultural explosion that transformed games into a huge, universal medium of popular entertainment. Strangely though, as much as the landscape has changed, I feel like the wheel has come full circle in the last couple of years. We're back in a period where one person working out of their bedroom could conceivably make the next breakthrough game that changes everything. And that's exciting.



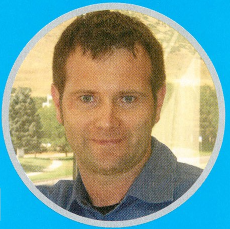
Developed for the Apple II, *Karateka* was noted for its animation, solid control, and great story.

> “For *Karateka*, it’s the combination of simple, fun, addictive gameplay with a relatable human story...all set in this cinematic, atmospheric world of medieval Japan.”

Photo: Stuart Pettican

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about



5

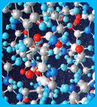
Healing touch

PlayStation Move game helps cancer-stricken kids build strength

The great thing about videogames is they offer an escape from reality. We can become virtually anyone—sports stars, superheroes, secret agents, medieval knights—and, in many cases, even save the world. Sometimes, though, videogames can help save us. Such is the goal of *PE Interactive* (PE standing for patient empowerment), a non-profit videogame that utilizes the PlayStation Move to help build strength in pediatric cancer patients.

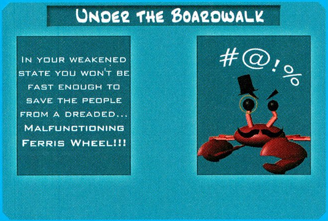
The project began when Grzegorz Bulaj (pictured upper right), an associate professor of medicinal chemistry at the University of Utah, met Tomas, a 10-year-old boy with a very deadly brain cancer. "Just meeting this boy and watching him, how strong his fighting was to overcome that disease was very extraordinary, and that captured my attention," says Bulaj. During his hospital visits with Tomas, Bulaj became fascinated with a device called an incentive spirometer, a breathing apparatus through which patients exhale to raise a ball as high as they can. The act of raising the ball—the incentive—helps patients visualize their progress, encouraging them to produce better results. Bulaj had an epiphany: why not create a videogame to help people, like Tomas, visualize their battle against life-threatening illnesses? After receiving seed funding from University of Utah's Department of Pediatrics, PE Interactive was born.

So how does it work? At its core, *PE Interactive* is a collection of minigames in which players control a superhero named Vance B. Strong, who has been weakened after a run-in with his arch nemesis. "In a sense, it's sort of what [the patients] are going through," says director of game design and production Roger



Life With PlayStation

Want to contribute to scientific medical research? Load up the Life With PlayStation app on PS3 to activate the Folding@Home project, which simulates the folding and misfolding of proteins, a natural process in the body. By better understanding this process, scientists can better understand the cause of diseases like Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, HIV, and cystic fibrosis.



UNDER THE BOARDWALK

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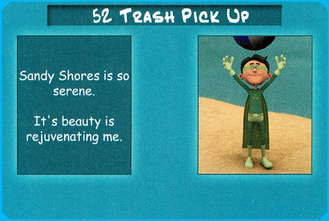
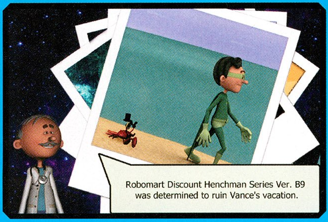


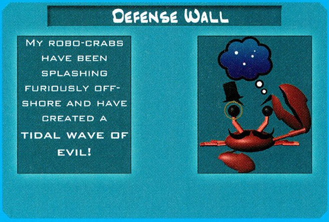
52 TRASH PICK UP

Sandy Shores is so serene.

It's beauty is rejuvenating me.



Robomart Discount Henchman Series Ver. B9 was determined to ruin Vance's vacation.



DEFENSE WALL

MY ROBO-CRABS HAVE BEEN SPLASHING FURIOUSLY OFF-SHORE AND HAVE CREATED A TIDAL WAVE OF EVIL!

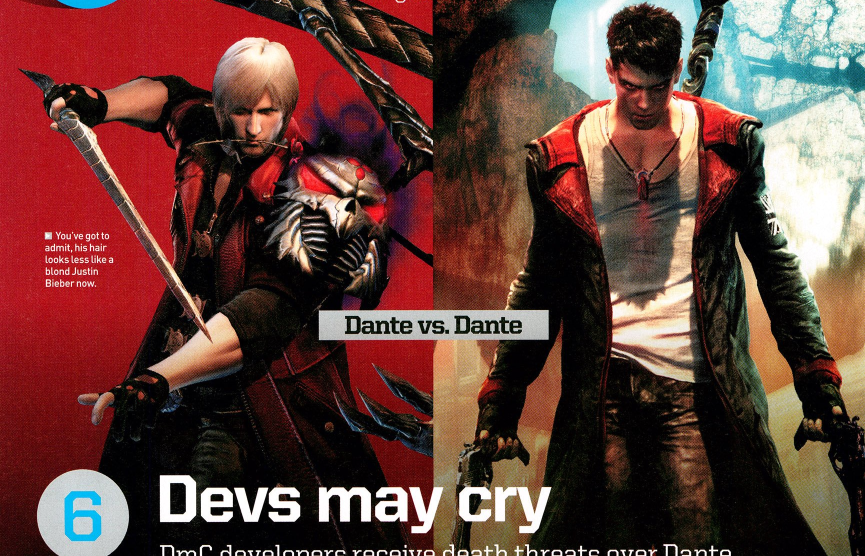
Altizer, recruited by Bulaj from the university's Entertainment Arts and Engineering program. "They're not feeling as good as they would've, but we're trying to encourage them that 'You're going to be great again, it just takes a little bit of effort and you're going to be super once again, just like this superhero's going to be super once again.'"

Altizer says levels are kept brief while incorporating physical activity, as many cancer patients don't have the endurance for long play periods. "We tried to include as much metaphor in the game as we could," he says. The main enemy in the game is a robotic crab—crab being the zodiac for Cancer—named B9, a pun on the word "benign." From a whack-a-mole-type game in which players smash crabs with a hammer (simulating the destruction of cancer cells), to a game where players build a giant wall to defend a seaside village from a tidal wave (symbolizing the strengthening of the immune system to fend off disease), every minigame in *PE Interactive* visually represents the battle against cancer.

The game's first play tester was Tomas, the young boy who inspired the project. Sadly, Tomas played the game for only a month; he passed away last October. Now the team behind *PE Interactive* is fundraising to send the game to clinical trials, where, if successful, it will be approved for patient use in hospitals and care facilities throughout the nation. Bulaj says this is only the beginning. The number of applications for games like *PE Interactive* can eventually be extended to help recovery from many types of ailments, including cystic fibrosis and stroke. "Sony's collaboration with us was one of the keys that really helped us get this off the ground," says Altizer. "This is one of the reasons why I love working at a University, because I'm able to show people that games can truly help people. It's not just about entertainment—games have a real positive effect on people, we can develop games that have a medical effect on people. Being able to be a part of that is almost like a dream come true."

As Vance B. Strong completes missions, he becomes more buff on screen.

Every minigame in *PE Interactive* visually represents the battle against cancer.



You've got to admit, his hair looks less like a blond Justin Bieber now.

6

Devs may cry

DmC developers receive death threats over Dante

Devil May Cry 4

When Fans Turn Feral

This isn't the first time that *Devil May Cry* fans have thrown their toys out ofthe ship. When the fourth game went multi-platform in 2008, a petition boycotting Capcom as a result of the decision gained a grand total of 12,466 signatures. With such strong words as "We (the people that have signed this petition) feel very left out," the petition is a testament to fans' passion for the series.

Games couldn't exist without passionate fans, but threatening to introduce developers to Mr G. Reaper is a rung a little further up the "Maybe I should get help" ladder than most of us would climb. Yet recently some *Devil May Cry* fans have more than happily scaled those absurd heights in response to new developer Ninja Theory's radical redesign of lead character Dante for new game *DmC*. And they've done so using some pretty innovative and funny-but-don't-laugh methods.

"I have to say that it's been pretty eye-opening to see some of the creative ways in which people have chosen to vent their hatred," creative director Tameem Antoniades explained in a recent interview. "We didn't expect death threats in comic-book form or anti-*DmC* death metal songs." It's a cause for concern, but we'd be lying if we said we didn't want to hear said creations. Can they really be any worse than Nickelback?

Dante's Inferno

Recently reported to be filming motion capture in the same studio used for James Cameron's *Avatar*, the new *Devil May Cry* title stars a far younger Dante with not a single white hair on his demon-slaying head. This fresh-faced Dante is youthful, dark-haired, and more than a little emo—the makeover has clearly incited wrath among his legions of fans.

Antoniades also confirmed the team were braced for negativity by Alex Garland, who wrote the developer's previous game—the criminally underrated *Enslaved: Odyssey to the West*. "Alex warned me he experienced a similar thing with *28 Days Later*. People were upset that it didn't feature real zombies."

Despite the design changes and the unique "feedback" offered from some corners, Dante's new boss is adamant that diehards will be far happier when they see *DmC* for themselves. He assures us the gameplay will deliver. And in the meantime? "It's pretty hard for me to back up the decisions we've made without showing actual gameplay to the public. So until that time comes, and it will come soon, I just have to put up with the rage."

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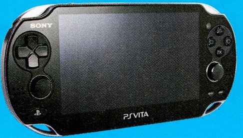


7

Vital information

Learn the ins and outs of the PS Vita with our simple, straightforward FAQ

What can the 3G Vita do that the regular Vita can't?
It can give you Twitter, GPS, and on-the-go Internet access, in addition to playing games that make use of location tracking. Social gaming app Near's range is greatly expanded. Leaderboards, transferable data (racing game ghosts, for instance), and turn-based multiplayer games can also update from anywhere.

Are Trophies on PlayStation 3 and Vita separate?
Nope—much to the excitement of Trophy hunters everywhere, you use the same PSN login for your PS3 and Vita. That means your *Gravity Rush* Trophies will sit alongside your *Uncharted 3* ones on the same account. Sounds good to us!

What is Near?
Near is a social app that checks your location every 30 minutes and tells you when other Vita users are nearby. Some games use Near to communicate with passers-by, trade items, and swap data. It allows for social gaming on a large scale.

Could I use another SIM card?
Unfortunately, no. In the U.S., Vita is SIM-locked to AT&T. However, the system is not region locked, so imported Japanese games should play no problem.

Does it work right out of the box?
Vita comes pre-charged, so you're greeted by an unskippable welcome video, PSN sign-up options, and a prompt to download the day-one firmware update.

Is Vita backward-compatible with PSP?
PSP games are available on the PSN store, but there's no way to easily transfer UMDs onto Vita. Sony ran a very limited UMD exchange scheme in Japan, but has announced that the program won't be coming to the U.S. However, PSP games transferred to the PS3 via direct link can then be transferred to Vita in the same manor.

Will PSN games work on both PS3 and Vita?
No. But never say never.

Is Vita scratch resistant?
No, so go easy and consider buying a case and screen protector.

How long does Vita last on a single charge?
Approximately 4 hours 30 minutes without Wi-Fi or 3G running. Sony states 2 hours 40 minutes to fully charge a drained battery, but some real-world tests indicate charge times of just under two hours.

Does it do video chat?
Yes, over Wi-Fi, but the cameras are one of this machine's weak spots. Don't expect a particularly pretty picture.

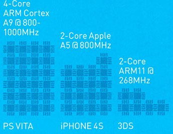
How powerful is the browser?
It's as functional as PS3's and works like the PS3 browser on sites optimized for PlayStation. We hope firmware updates add support for Flash or an equivalent video player, though.

Will Netflix and other on-demand content be available?
It's down to HBO, Amazon, Netflix, and other external companies to support it. For now, Vita has its own On Demand video system running on the Japanese PSN, with music videos, some Hollywood flicks, and a whole lot of anime.

Can you Remote Play all PS3 games?
A forthcoming PS3 firmware update will add Remote Play, but like PSP, it might be limited to select titles. Unlike PSP, however, Vita has enough controls to handle any PS3 game. YouTube videos show *Battlefield 3* running on Vita via a hacked PS3. Impressive.

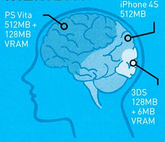
HOW THE VITA COMPARES

CPU



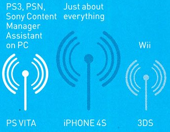
Analysis: Vita is the most powerful handheld in the business

MEMORY



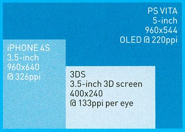
Analysis: iPhone is even, but Vita has an extra 128MB of video RAM

CONNECTIVITY



Analysis: PS3 game-streaming and PSN synching are key for Vita

SCREEN



Analysis: Everyone wins this one—Vita is bigger, iPhone is sharper, 3DS is 3D

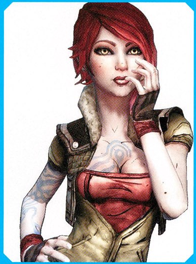
SCAN IT!

http://bit.ly/ygCwBh

See more of Yasemin Arslan by scanning the QR Code!

8 Siren's call

This cosplayer isn't pretend playing anymore thanks to Borderlands 2



The Guardian Angel isn't the only human face we'll see in *Borderlands 2*. "I fell in love with Lilith almost instantly. She's strong, resilient, and a bit of a badass. Playing a cocky gal with a backbone was quite appealing to me," says Yasemin Arslan—the new face of *Borderlands 2's* Siren. Arslan professes she was a fan of the character before she was cast to play her in the new game's live-action sequences. We're big supporters of cosplay, but this is more than simply dressing up. As Lilith, Arslan serves as an NPC guide in *Borderlands 2*, much like the Guardian Angel—who also appears in the sequel—did in the first game.

A longtime cosplayer in the Australian community, Arslan has experimented with anime, videogames, and some of her own creations. In her gaming closet are KOS-MOS from the *Xenosaga* series, Vanille from *Final Fantasy XIII*, and Asuka Kazama from *Tekken*. "To cosplay a certain character, I have to have a deep connection with them or have respect for the image they represent," she says.

The connection and respect Arslan finds in her cosplay carries over to how she feels about playing *Borderlands*. "People usually say they love boss battles, the unbelievable variety of weapons, and the characters' power upgrades—which of course I love, too—but the best thing about it is the comic appeal of the characters." We expected no less of the woman about to embody the sultry, snarky Siren class.

9 The Readers' Most Wanted

After the huge March releases, our Readers' Most Wanted List lost some hard hitters. Taking their places are *Black Ops 2*, *Resident Evil 6*, *Madden NFL 13*, and *Borderlands 2*. The first three are fairly recent announcements, but *Borderlands 2* has been in the works for a while and we're admittedly surprised this is its first appearance. *BioShock Infinite* and *DmC* have also hopped back in to fill the void.

01 *Call of Duty: Black Ops 2*
02 *Grand Theft Auto V*
03 *Resident Evil 6*
04 *Madden NFL 13*
05 *Final Fantasy XIV Online*
06 *BioShock Infinite*
07 *DmC: Devil May Cry*
08 *Borderlands 2*
09 *Max Payne 3*
10 *Tom Clancy's Rainbow 6: Patriots*
11 *Ninja Gaiden 3*
12 *Prototype 2*
13 *LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes*
14 *Sorcery*
15 *Starhawk*
16 *Deadliest Warriors: Ancient Combat*
17 *Game of Thrones*
18 *Aliens: Colonial Marines*
19 *Prey 2*
20 *Risen 2: Dark Waters*

PROTOTYPE 2

PREY 2

Stats in this chart appear courtesy of Ipsos OTX MediaCT's GamePlan Insights. All games are PS3 titles. Polling period was January 22, 2012 to February 4, 2012.

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

10 Does PS Vita have too many ports?

This launch lineup looks familiar...maybe *too* familiar

Yes

Says the always fresh **Scott Butterworth**

My desk is currently covered in Vita games. I mean *stacked*. And while that's extremely exciting on the surface, I decided to conduct an experiment. For science. I divided the games into three piles: direct ports, new games from existing franchises, and new IPs. To my dismay, I discovered that over 50-percent of the launch lineup consists of direct ports—many of which I've already played on PS3—with only a small handful of truly original games.

In some cases—looking at you, *Dungeon Hunter: Alliance*—the Vita game actually costs twice as much as the original for no apparent reason. Am I really paying double the price just to take the game on the go? As someone who doesn't game in transit much, why wouldn't I just stick to my PS3? Portability isn't enough to convince me. I need original experiences to inspire me to pick up my Vita instead of my DualShock, and right now the number of new IPs is distressingly low.

Sure, some ports give great games a second chance and are well worth the asking price, but looking toward the future, the Vita is going to need its own killer apps in order to thrive. This platform has way too much potential to simply become a safety net for PS3 castoffs and second-chancers. Without more games like *Gravity Rush* and *Sound Shapes*, Vita is going suffer a slow start...and may not recover.

No

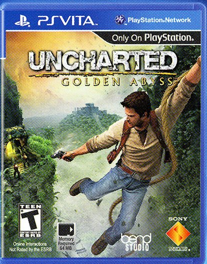
Says the port-loving **Ryan Taljonick**

Please, Scott, enlighten me. Why is it wrong that the Vita's launch is supplemented with a healthy dose of ports? Sure, some of them feel stale, but I can't think of a single launch lineup—console or handheld—that's ever been 100-percent rock solid. Honestly, the thought of having some of my favorite console games available to play on the go is pretty exciting. I'm beyond ecstatic to dig into *Ninja Gaiden Sigma Plus, Rayman Origins,* and the upcoming *Final Fantasy X HD*.

As for new IPs? While *Army Corps of Hell, Reality Fighters,* and *Escape Plan* hold the fort, there are a handful of Vita-exclusive titles just outside the launch window: *Gravity Rush, Unit 13, Sumioni, Sound Shapes,* and *Warrior's Lair*, just to name a few. And those titles look pretty darn solid to me. Of course, let's not forget the Vita-exclusives of already-existing franchises: *Uncharted: Golden Abyss, Resistance: Burning Skies, Touch My Katamari*—that doesn't even exhaust the list.

I don't understand how you can lament the Vita's lack of new IPs when there are plenty on the horizon. Honestly, this platform is easily keeping pace with the PS3 in terms of original titles. Now that Sony's poured a hefty chunk of cash into ensuring Vita's success, I doubt we'll stop seeing new IPs anytime soon. And hey, maybe we'll see some more old favorites too.

Get started with the most insane handheld gaming experience ever.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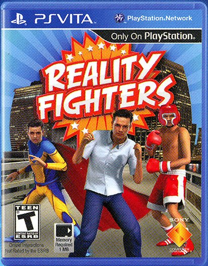
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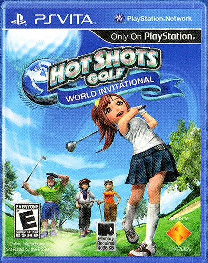
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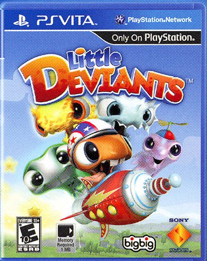
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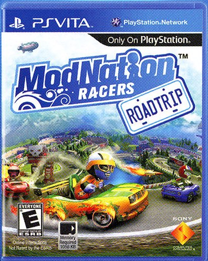
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Memory Required 1056 KB
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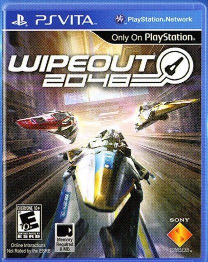
PS VITA
PlayStation Network
Only On PlayStation
WIPEOUT 2048
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Online Interactions Not Rated by the ESRB
Memory Required 8 MB
SONY

SONY
PS VITA
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PRODUCTS RANGE FROM
EVERYONE TO TEEN
E-T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Features

Play Up All Night

www.us.playstation.com/psvita

Join the PlayStation Vita Community

Sign up to get email updates about the PS Vita system and become one of the first to know about new features, announcements, and games — plus get exclusive content.

Front Touch

The multi touch display offers new ways to complete challenges and actions, all on a stunning 5" OLED screen.

SONY
1 2 3
Welcome Park
Group Messaging
Photos
Music

Rear Touch

The rear multi touch pad provides new ways to control your favorite games, and allows for maximum visibility of the brilliant OLED screen.

Cross Platform Play

With cross platform play you can start playing a game on your PS3™ console, pause the game and pick up on your PS Vita right where you left off. You can also join in multiplayer games on your PS Vita system and play against players on their PS3™ consoles.

Motion Sensors

With PS Vita system's motion sensor technology, actively engage with the game like never before as you touch, tilt, and steer your PS Vita system. Discover the endless ways to manipulate your environment and compete in new ways with your characters in game.

Front/Rear Cameras

Use the front and rear cameras on your PS Vita system to create amazing augmented reality experiences by transporting your world or yourself into your game.

OLED Screen

The PS Vita OLED screen is simply the most brilliant display for the biggest and best games ever designed.

5
arty
PS Store
near
Trophies
riends
Browser
VITA
SELECT
START

Dual Analog Sticks

Discover a fully immersive first person shooter experience with dual analog sticks.

3G

3G/AT&T Stay Connected

The new PS Vita 3G/Wi-Fi model, powered by AT&T's Mobile Broadband Network, will change the way you game with real-time scores and game ranking news feeds, competitive multiplayer game sessions, gifting, treasure hunts, cross-platform gameplay and cross-game text messaging with Party. Game at the speed of your mobile life style.

GPS

Locate, connect and play with friends via GPS and social networking apps like near.

NEVER STOP PLAYING.

Connect to AT&T
SONY
NW Carrier 3G
12:34
Out-and-About Radar
Dolores Street, San Francisco
You have found a new game !
4/6/2011 03:00 PM
× 53
2mile
1mile
SELECT
START
PS VITA

ALWAYS COMPETITIVE WITH 3G.

3G connectivity. Game with your friends when you want and in more places.

Connected by AT&T

near
Locate and play with friends via GPS

PS VITA
PlayStation®Vita

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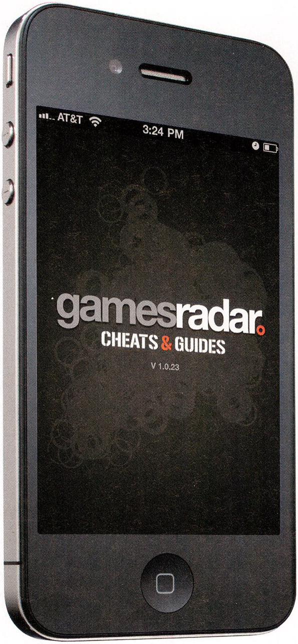
“★★★★★”

Amazing app, and it's FREE!

by Vitsnuklz

“★★★★★
THE BEST GUIDES
on the internet…
ALL IN ONE PLACE”
by Samael76

“★★★★★
Thank you GamesRadar for
FEEDING MY ADDICTION”
by Poconoscott



“★★★★★
GamesRadar is
FULL OF WIN”
by Marcello Almaguer

“★★★★★
AWESOMESAUCE!
Great app. I love!”
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Previews

FIRST LOOK Format **PS3** ETA **Fall** Pub **Activision** Dev **High Moon Studios**

Transformers

Fall of Cybertron

Home sweet home isn't so sweet anymore

It's pretty undeniable. Transformers are rad. And not just as a group—each of them can change into deadly fighter jets, trucks, suped-up muscle cars, unstoppable trucks, and just about whatever else they want. Not only that, they've got all kinds of cool powers even when they're not hanging out as their automotive alter egos. *Transformers: Fall of Cybertron* is all about letting a huge variety of *Transformers* characters be their awesome selves.

Getting Personal

As we follow the story of the final days of the war between the Autobots and Decepticons, we'll take on the roles of many different characters on both sides of the struggle. Sporting a single, weaving campaign (replacing the dual stories from *War for Cybertron*), *Fall of Cybertron* boasts a strong narrative focus.

This means a huge variety in the way the game plays. Flipping between Vortex and his ability to fly around the battlefield to the melee-oriented brute Grimlock may seem jarring, but the focus on keeping each level fresh and interesting is something that is more than welcome after the sometime repetitive nature of *War for Cybertron*.

Of course, there are a few obvious standouts when it comes to awesome abilities. Vortex may be able to fly, but Jazz's grappling hook is sleek, fast, and works fabulously with his default sniper rifle. Traversing to a tactically optimal vantage point and popping off the head of an enemy caught unawares is enormously fun.

And then there's Optimus Prime. Having awoken the city-sized Metroplex while attempting to power up the defenses of the Autobot's final stronghold, he has been given the ability to command where the monstrous robot attacks. With a press of a button, he can aim Metroplex's rage, causing situation-specific attacks. Need a ship taken out? Metroplex has the missiles for that. Is there a skyscraper standing in the way? The big guy has no problem shoving it over. The sheer scale of the attacks is certainly something to behold.

Speaking of Scale

Cybertron is a planet covered in sweeping robotic environments, and High Moon Studios isn't afraid to show it off. Each area of the game is as massive as the Unreal Engine can handle, taking full advantage of many of the 'bots formidable traversal powers. These are enormous metallic zones that allow us

▸▸

Quick Pitch

Scale

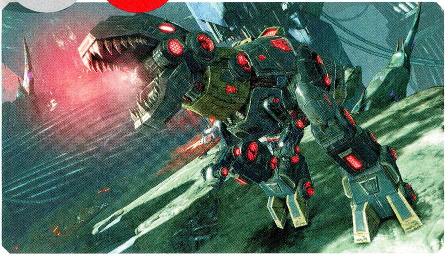
Explore Cybertron in its full, epic glory as giant robots.

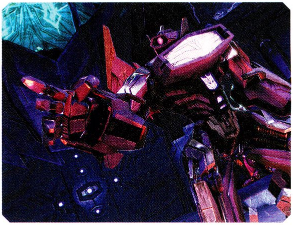
Variety

Each level plays differently depending on the selected *Transformers* character.

Authenticity

Dev High Moon is putting their spin on the franchise, but staying true to the source.





Battles are intense, fast, and require strong strategic skills to survive.

Giant robots beating the heck out of each other? Yes please.

Getting around is easy when you're your own transportation.

to take full advantage of all sorts of strategic possibilities. Everything from basic cover strategies to stealth maneuvers to run-and-gun attacks are viable options.

Not only are the levels vast, many of the robots that call Cybertron home are colossal as well. Consider that dinosaur literally means "gigantic lizard." Well, Grimlock takes that meaning to heart. Kill enough enemies with his energy sword and shield, and his Rage bar will fill up, allowing him to transform into a fire breathing T-Rex. Is there anything cooler? We propose not.

For fans of another robo show, *Voltron*, there's Bruticus, formed when the five Combaticons throw themselves together. His blazing laser and crushing punches are among the most powerful attacks in the game.

Considering what we're seeing in this early build, it's not hard to believe that *Fall of Cybertron* could be the epic *Transformers* story we've been waiting for. TAYLOR COCKE

Cybertron could be the *Transformers* story we've been waiting for.

Firmware Update Big changes in Fall of Cybertron

1 **Flying Solo** The campaign doesn't have a cooperative option, which might result in a more focused, well-designed campaign.

2 **Guns Blazin'** Ammo is abundant, rather than hard to find. This means we'll be able to blast away to our heart's content. *Pew pew pew!*

3 **War Time** The lone campaign tells a more coherent story by letting us play as both the Autobots and Decepticons.

4 **Tech Support** The Teletran store allows for a ton of character customization and powerful weapon upgrades.

5 **Construction** There's a robust character creator for multiplayer modes, allowing us to build our very own robot from the ground up.

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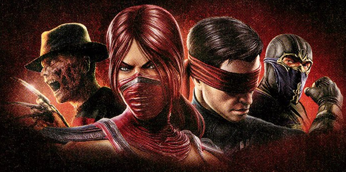
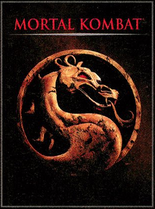


4 NEW CHARACTERS

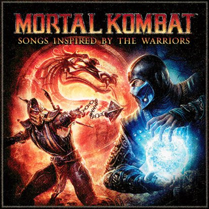
THE BEST FIGHTER IS NOW KOMPLETE

15 KLASSIC SKINS

DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT


MORTAL KOMBAT

MORTAL KOMBAT
DIGITAL MOVIE*


MORTAL KOMBAT
SONGS INSPIRED BY THE WARRIORS

MORTAL KOMBAT: SONGS
INSPIRED BY THE WARRIORS
[WITH BONUS TRACK]*

MATURE 17+
M
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Partial Nudity
Strong Language
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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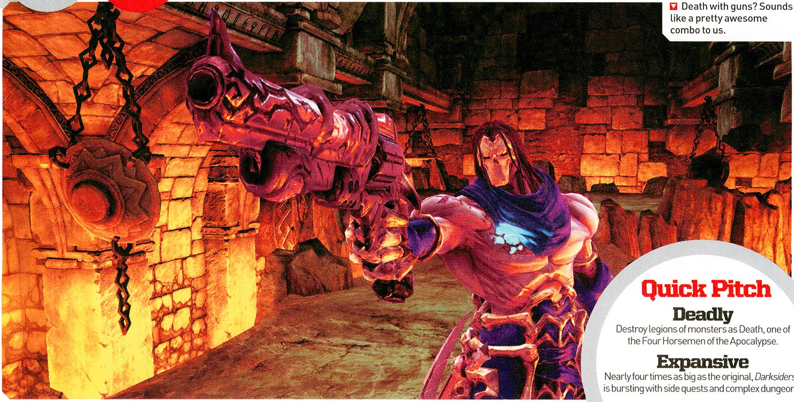


Death with guns? Sounds like a pretty awesome combo to us.

Quick Pitch

Deadly
Destroy legions of monsters as Death, one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

Expansive
Nearly four times as big as the original, *Darksiders II* is bursting with side quests and complex dungeons.

Customizable
With access to two different skill trees, we can tailor Death's skills to fit our playstyle.

FIRST LOOK Format **PS3** ETA **Summer** Pub **THQ** Dev **Vigil Games**

Darksiders II

Fear the reaper

As the old adage goes, nothing is certain but death and taxes. But in the case of *Darksiders II*, a new dogmatism belongs on that list of certainties: revenge. Lots and lots of revenge. Our new protagonist Death, the most feared Horseman of the Apocalypse, knows his brother War has been framed for prematurely bringing about the Earth-ending apocalypse—and he's not too happy about it. Haydn Dalton, lead designer of *Darksiders II*, says Death's journey runs parallel to the events of the first game. "It answers the question of 'Where was Death when this was all going down for War?'" Dalton says. "This is kind of like Death's personal adventure trying to clear his brother's name."

The Pale Rider

Our demo began as Death entered a lava-filled dungeon. Moving forward, a group of monsters attacked, eager to conquer the Reaper of Souls. Funny, considering Death typically does the conquering. Unlike War's slow but powerful sword attacks, Death dual wields two agile scythes, which combine to form one giant weapon—the Harvester—during certain combos. "Death is pretty much non-stop as a character, he's very agile," Dalton says. "He doesn't block, he doesn't stand in one place—he's usually moving away from the target, then kind of quickly moving back in and parrying and attacking very quickly."

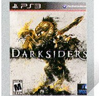
Dalton isn't exaggerating—Death destroys his opponents with ruthless efficiency. His dagger-like scythes quickly chipped away at his enemies' health, turning them into pulpy piles of flesh in a matter of seconds. Secondary weapons, like giant hammers and Death's trusty pistols, have different strengths and weaknesses and are perfect for chaining combos. After dodging an enemy attack, Death can even use a grappling hook (called the Ghost Hand) to close the distance to his targets. He danced around the battlefield, becoming a devastating whirlwind of surgical precision and acrobatic dodges.

Upon mowing down the last of the monsters, an ogre-like brute entered the fray. Using the Exhume ability, Death summoned a group of minions to assist with his opponent. While our new companions distracted the ogre, we used the Murder spell, summoning a flock of demonic crows that dealt consistent damage over time. Finally, we activated Death's Reaper Form (similar to War's Chaos Form), transforming him into a dark angel of destruction. This ability allows us to cause massive damage, but only remains active until our Reaper Meter is depleted. Shortly after, the ogre lay dead at our feet.

Dancing with Death

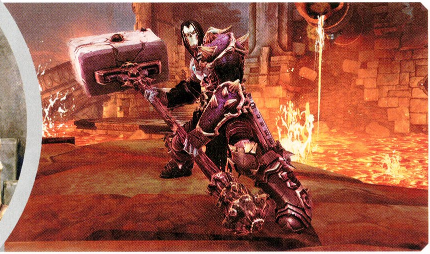
The most noticeable change in

Can't Wait? Play this



Darksiders
(PS3, 2010)
In PTOM's February 2010 issue, reviewer Mikel Reparaz said: "There was a time, not so long ago, when a game like *Darksiders* would have been hyped as a '*Zelda*-killer.'" Well, it probably didn't kill *Zelda*—but *Darksiders* is still pretty damn good.

Verdict: 8



▲ Hammers like this are just one of the many secondary weapon types available for use.

Death destroys his opponents with ruthless efficiency.

Darksiders II is the sheer number of RPG tropes it employs. Death levels up after killing enemies and completing quests, allowing us to distribute skill points between two skill trees: The Harbinger tree focuses on in-your-face melee abilities while the Necromancer tree caters to players who prefer spell casting. Stat-boosting weapons and armor are obtained through combat and side quests, further supplementing Death's abilities. Despite the addition of so many RPG mechanics, *Darksiders II* still plays much like its predecessor. Puzzle solving and traps are an integral part of its expansive world; it draws more parallels to action adventure games like *Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver* than loot-laden RPGs like *Dungeon Siege III*. Dalton says *Darksiders II* will also be substantially larger than the original and will feature a world full of meaningful side quests and plenty of content that can be found only through exploration. Most importantly, Dalton hopes his team's vision of *Darksiders II* will resonate with gamers who love classic action adventure titles.

"There's something awesome about being able to see a hurdle and then at some point being able to overcome that hurdle as a player," he says. "We kind of embrace that. *The Legend of Zelda* is probably the biggest title that is known for that style of gameplay—*Soul Reaver* is very similar. These are games we played growing up, games that we loved. It's a dying breed; there aren't many games that do this anymore. I think from the fans we've gotten the reaction that that's the style of game they do want to play."

RYAN TALJONICK

Dev Talk

"Death was very nearly the character in the first game. I think if you ask pretty much anyone if they could name the Four Horsemen, they could always name Death."

Haydn Dalton
Lead Designer

Gore Time Five other action games with brutal, bloody combat

Dante's Inferno

God of War III

Castlevania: Lords of Shadow

Bayonetta

Kingdoms of Amalur

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **May** Pub **Capcom** Dev **Capcom**

Dragon's Dogma

Slaying brutes as a heartless hero

The start of *Dragon's Dogma* doesn't feature a lengthy intro movie or a character creation screen, instead the game begins in a dark cavern. Lighting a lantern to illuminate the scene, we quickly realize that we're in the lair of one of the game's titular beasts, confirmed by the giant fireball that scorches the path ahead. After expanding our party to four by summoning A.I. helpers from a glowing stone in the cave, we encounter a giant foe in battle. But it's no dragon; it's a ghastly chimera comprised of separate lion, snake, and goat heads. This is certainly where things get interesting.

While the combat is of the typical hack-'n'-slash, arrow-launching, or spell-casting variety, these large-scale battles hold some surprises depending on the selected player class. The chimera punished us with sleep-inducing spells from its snake mouth and quick pounces on the lion side, but as we returned the favor with rapid blows—some delivered while ascending the monster—and magic from our allies, its heads died one by one. It's a brief introduction that teases what's to come, but still highlights the game's strengths of varied combat and creatively designed foes. From there, the world opens up; we created our own hero, though his heart was promptly ripped from his chest by a towering dragon, our primary objective now to win it back over the course of the quest-filled adventure.

Dogma's initial hours teach the essentials amidst tantalizing glimpses of vast, explorable countryside and frightening creatures. After an early taste, we're curious if Capcom's stab at blending elements of *Monster Hunter* and *Dragon Age* can keep the surprises coming across a purportedly lengthy journey. **ANDREW HAYWARD**

Surely we're not the only ones wondering how this guy can carry a sword that very obviously weighs at least 300 pounds?

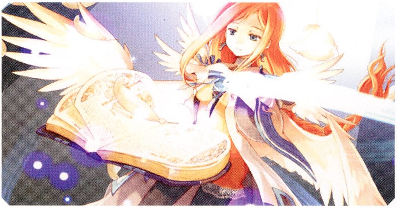
Giant, intense battles are one of *Dragon's Dogma's* greatest appeals.

We can grab onto massive beasts, scale them, and strike from atop their bodies.

FIRST LOOK Format **PS Vita** ETA **April** Pub **NIS America** Dev **Nippon Ichi**

Disgaea 3 Absence of Detention

Staying after school has its upside



The Evil Academy is open again. Like returning from summer vacation, it's a chance to experience friends old and new, but this time on PS Vita. The early school year forecast indicates *Disgaea 3: Absence of Detention* will be more than a port—the Vita edition includes every PS3 DLC comprising 20 extra characters, 40 music tracks, three new gameplay systems, and a scenario starring the rebellious Raspberyl. NIS has also developed original content for the Vita version with two new characters, cameos from *Disgaea 4's* Fuka and Desco, and four new scenarios.

Detention bolsters *Disgaea's* cornerstone strategy gameplay with new skills for each class and a highly charged super-move to save the day. Also new: Tera magic—almighty spells featuring character cameos drawn by guest artists. The game even brings Vita's interface features into play. We can move characters around the headquarters with the touchscreen and receive bonuses like extra experience, discounts, and Mana points with GPS functionality. For customization lovers, there's an option to alter weapon visuals, and if level 9999 is the goal, there's a reward with the ultimate humble brag: leaderboards.

We can't wait for Mao and company to prove once again why they're too cool for school. KIMBERLEY WALLACE

▲ Considering its pedigree and complete content package, *Detention* ranks as our most anticipated Vita RPG.

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... AND SYNCHRONISED BLACK
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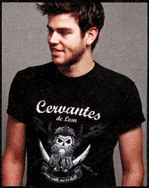

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Edge magazine

'The only gaming gear I'm proud to wear to the pub.'
Graeme Boyd, Xbox

WORLDWIDE DELIVERY!

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Every environment is decorated with fans, tents, blimps, *whatever* to give the experience a party feel.

Quick Pitch

New Directions

Showdown steers the series toward action, excitement, and, most importantly, fun.

Crash and Burn

New destruction events add a little demolition derby to the rally car racing.

Along for the Ride

The developers call this "the most connected Codemasters game ever."

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **May** Pub **Codemasters** Dev **Codemasters**

Dirt Showdown

When in doubt, add pyrotechnics

According to Codemasters developer Iain Smith, *Dirt 4* is on the way. *Dirt Showdown*, however, is definitely not *Dirt 4*. Rather, it's a spin-off of the long-running rally series that focuses more on action-packed insanity than traditional racing while cultivating a strong "festival atmosphere" inspired by events like desert dance party Burning Man. In other words, more action sports, less motorsports.

In keeping with the game's new direction, the experience has been divided into three distinct parts, each with its own events: speed, style, and destruction. Speed events still feature standard races, but the action is far more aggressive, with nitrous, ramps, and plenty of car-on-car action. Style events—which borrow from real-life "hoonigan" driving—present players with specific challenges and allow them explore open areas all while performing tricks. And Destruction, well, that one's self-explanatory. The game's career mode incorporates all of the above in a traveling tour of motorized madness, and, naturally, allows us to earn cash, purchase upgrades, and buy new vehicles as we progress. Of course, we can also earn cash by betting with friends in one of the game's online Party Modes (a throwback to *Dirt 3*), or we can simply jump into joyride mode—which, unlike past *Dirt* games, is now an entirely separate mode—to complete missions, find packages, and explore freely.

Tire Iron

Much like the game's over-the-top events, the selection of vehicles extends far beyond what we've come to expect from *Dirt*. While all of the hoonigan rides are officially licensed from the likes of Ken Block, many cars—like the Chevy El Camino-looking beater and the VW van-inspired rolling hippie death machine—are slightly more fictional. Similarly, the levels, spanning from the snow-covered backcountry of Colorado to the hot, dry deserts of Nevada, are slightly fantastic, with split routes, choke points, and other risk/reward-inspired obstacles that should ensure the winner's not decided in the first turn.

In our brief hands-on time, the gameplay perfectly reflected the fun-focused arcade approach. Our first race event featured flames, fans, and a figure 8-like track that crossed itself for maximum crash potential. Then in our "king of the ring"-style destruction event, we manically sped around trying to ram our flailing opponents. The thrill-seeking attitude and adrenaline-charged action was enough to make us want to crush an energy drink can on our foreheads...bad idea.

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

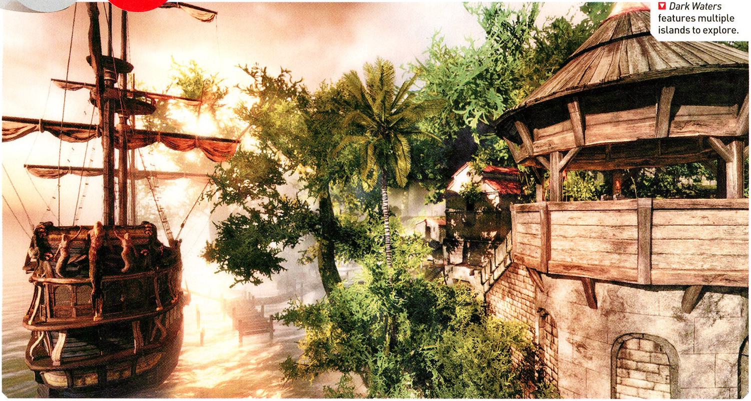
You Too

Ever wanted to upload a video of your exploits to YouTube with just the touch of a button? Well *Showdown* is here to make your dream a reality. Every match ends with a looping replay that can be edited and uploaded right on the spot, so now bragging rights can be based on more than a leaderboard.

We love us some destruction derby action.

For the first time in series history, we can fill a boost meter by drifting, dodging, and smashing up opponents.

In destruction events, points double in the last 30 seconds, creating some intense finales.



▼ *Dark Waters* features multiple islands to explore.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **April** Pub **Deep Silver** Dev **Piranha Bytes**

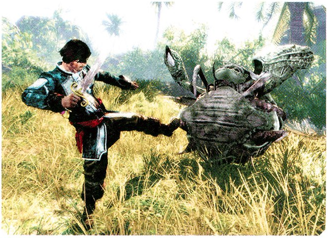
Risen 2
Dark Waters

Peg legs and pirates ahoy

Wielding firearms after slamming a few bottles of rum is typically frowned upon—unless we're talkin' about pirates, of course. Our character in *Risen 2: Dark Waters*, Piranha Bytes' forthcoming pirate RPG, frequently does just that, wielding an assortment of weapons (including boomsticks, sharp swords, and magical voodoo staves) while hitting the sauce to replenish his health. Seriously. Rum is the pirate's panacea, curing everything from bullet holes to stab wounds.

Our hands-on adventure began on the island of Antigua, a sort of pirate headquarters full of foul-mouthed scallywags and hostile wildlife. While scouring the jungle-like environment for treasure, we encountered all sorts of angry beasts. Combat is simple; we pulled off combo attacks with our sword, supplementing our onslaught with "dirty tricks," which are essentially secondary weapons. Pistols are great for ranged attacks, voodoo dolls allow us to use magic-like abilities, and our trusty parrot (every pirate needs a parrot!) distracted enemies long enough for us to make an escape or cut them down to bloody pieces. By the end of our demo, we scored a sizable amount of booty—and when other pirates tried to "persuade" us into sharing, we let our pistol do most of the talking.

RYAN TALJONICK



▲ A kick mechanic allows us to interrupt enemy attacks.

▲ This cave looks pretty ni—OH GOD GIANT SPIDERS!

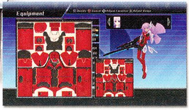
PERIL IN GAMINDUSTRI!
CPU CANDIDATES, ASSEMBLE!

Planeptune

OVER 12 PLAYABLE CHARACTERS!
Enough game console personifications to create your dream team!

Oops, manners. I'm Falcom.
As you can tell from my garb.
I'm just a stock adventuress.

MULTIPLE ENDINGS
Friendships made during the game affect your ending!

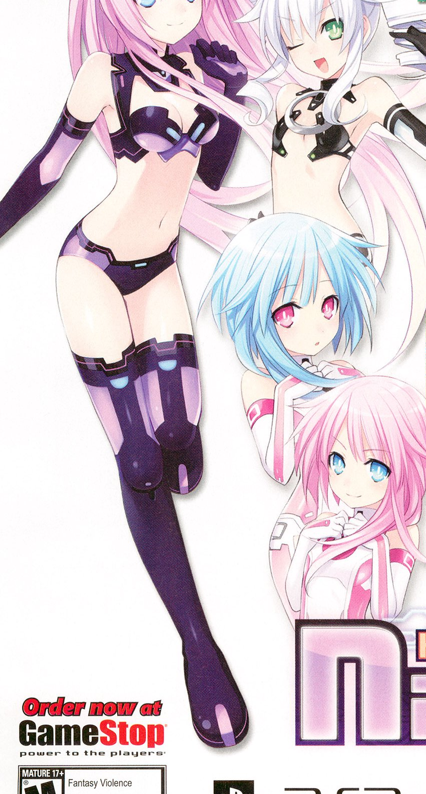


TEXTURE CUSTOMIZATION
Customize Nepgear's transformed version with your own image files!

TRANSFORMATION
Transform to unleash the girls' true powers and special abilities!

FREE-ROAMING BATTLE SYSTEM
Run freely around the battle map to set up spatial and dynamic strategies!

ITEM DEVELOPMENT
Develop new items to make your journey easier—and more fun!



Nepgear, the CPU Candidate of Planeptune and younger sister to Neptune, sets out on her quest with IF and Compa to regain Gamindustri's prosperity, stop the syndicate of evil that Arfoire created, and set her sister free! During her travels across the world, Nepgear will encounter friends new and old, meet the other CPU Candidates, and take care of any monsters that stand in her way in this classic JRPG tale of good versus evil!

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Sexual Themes

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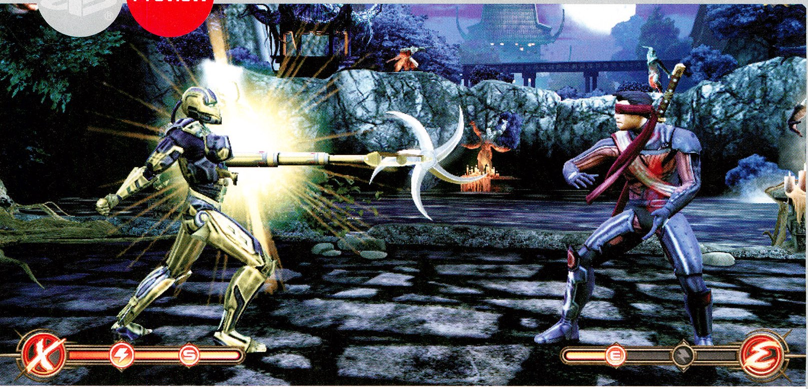
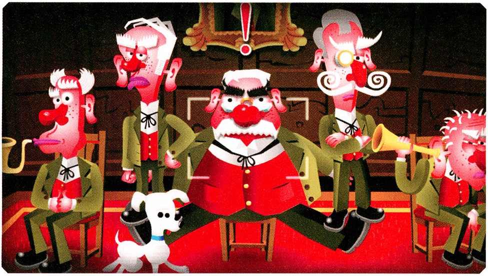


FIRST LOOK Format **PS Vita** ETA **April** Pub **Warner Bros. Interactive Ent.** Dev **NetherRealm Studios**

Mortal Kombat

Portable combat

Need more blood and gore on the go? The Vita version of *Mortal Kombat* retains all the gut-wrenching brutality of last year's PS3 reboot, including every character, challenge, and Fatality. It also includes all previously released DLC as well as 150 new missions in the Challenge Tower, many of which cater to Vita's unique functionality. Ready to battle an opponent while tapping incoming missiles or literally wiping blood off the screen? No? Well, there's always the good ol' online matches. **SCOTT BUTTERWORTH**

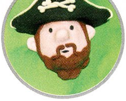


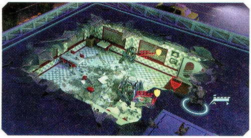
FIRST LOOK Format **PS Vita** ETA **TBD** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Honeyslug**

Frobisher Says

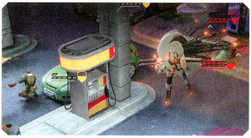
Way more fun than Simon

We here at PTOM have a habit of belittling minigames. And most of the time, it feels justified. But that's not to say that minigames can't be done well. Enter *Frobisher Says*, a quirky little Vita offering that challenges us to quickly complete simple tasks with little to no instruction. The formula is simple enough, but the





Ground-level combat is just one half of *Xcom*.



FIRST LOOK Format **PS3** ETA **2012** Pub **2K Games** Dev **Firaxis**

XCOM Enemy Unknown

Alien butt-kicking returns in classic form

XCOM: *Enemy Unknown* is two games mashed into one. On top, there's a real-time strategy game: we must lead an international organization against an alien invasion. We'll even build an underground base, hire scientists, research new technology, launch satellites, and recruit and customize our roster of soldiers.

Beneath that, there's the turn-based stuff. In small-scale skirmishes, we'll direct every move those customized soldiers make in their fight against dozens of creepy extraterrestials. We can pick their equipment, order them behind cover, tell them where to shoot, and when to flank or blow holes in any walls that get in their way.

What made the 1994 original such a classic was the way it tied those two games together, making our decisions back at base have enormous consequences on the battles we fought with your favorite soldiers. This reboot is especially exciting because it updates those concepts for new audiences. We'll still curse those alien jerks when a soldier we've levelled up for 20 hours is killed by an exploding gas pump, but now there are classes, perks and more cinematic flair—it looks great.

If the PS3 feels like an odd home for a combination of RTS and turn-based battling, don't worry. The other joy of *XCOM* is that for all its tech trees and statistics—and there are plenty of both—its controls have always been simple. Ever felt like being the boss of every character in *Independence Day*? If so, then start getting excited. With Firaxis at the wheel, we're hopeful that this will sit happily alongside 2K Marin's upcoming FPS—giving us not one but two *XCOM* reboots to look forward to this year.

JAMES COATES

Prequels

Also in the series

ENEMY UNKNOWN
MICRO PROSE

UFO: Enemy Unknown
(PSone, 1995)
A strategy classic, and the template for the rest of the series.

XCOM: Apocalypse
(PC, 1997)
Replaced defending the world with saving a single, adapting city.

XCOM: Enforcer
(PC, 2001)
Awful Atari actioner that put the series into a ten-year coma.

---

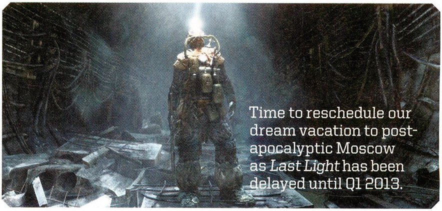
light-hearted presentation and lightning-fast pace certainly help set the experience apart from the typical minigame collection.

An average 60-seconds with the game might look like this: punch a bear by mashing the triggers, then find a flan by navigating a brief 2D platforming level, and finally pry open some clams using the touchscreen, all while trying to beat the clock. Not all of the puzzles will be quite so obvious as bear punching, but many of the games play to Vita's strengths by highlighting its unique functionality in unexpected ways. While the game is set to launch soon in the UK, there's still no word on a stateside release. PTOM says, "Make it soon!" After all, PlayStation needs its very own *WarioWare*.

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

Where the hell is...

Metro: Last Light (THQ)



Time to reschedule our dream vacation to post-apocalyptic Moscow as *Last Light* has been delayed until Q1 2013.

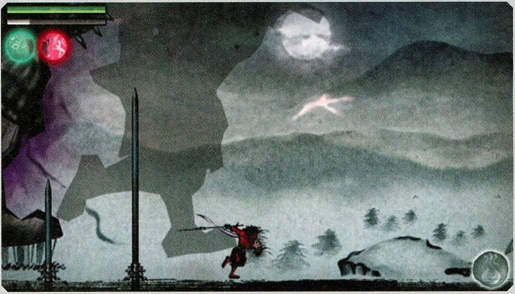
The latest on...

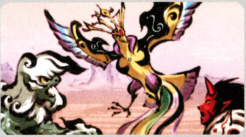
New shots, new games, new info

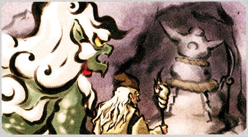
Sumioni: Demon Arts

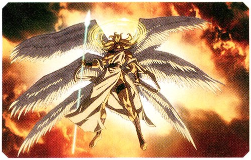
Format **PS Vita** ETA **Spring** Pub **XSEED Games**
Dev **Acquire**

Taking a page from beloved PS2 game *Okami's* art book, *Sumioni: Demon Arts* puts the paintbrush in our hands as we create platforms, fire, and water—as well as summon animal-form Ink Gods with the swipe of a finger—to help the Ink Demon Agura defeat the evil Seimei and earn his freedom. This side-scrolling title is a blend of hack-'n'-slash combat and platforming that has Agura face level after level brimming with enemies and bosses. The score at the end of each stage determines which new path, and ultimately which of *Sumioni's* multiple endings, will be revealed.





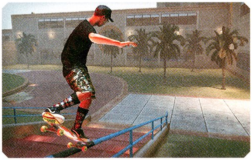




Growlanser: Wayfarer of Time

Format **PSP** ETA **Summer** Pub **Atlus** Dev **Atlus**

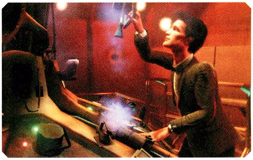
The PS2 strategy RPG is getting remastered for the PSP and finally released in North America with many improvements and additions, including optimized load times and new characters. The original Japanese audio track will not be available in the PSP iteration.



Tony Hawk's Pro Skater HD

Format **PSN** ETA **Summer** Pub **Activision** Dev **Robomodo**

What to do when a franchise is getting stale? How about going back to its roots? *Tony Hawk* is going HD and bringing back old faces and levels from the first two *Pro Skater* titles with new polish and some of today's skaters, including Hawk's own son, Riley.



Doctor Who: The Eternity Clock

Format **PS Vita** ETA **March** Pub **BBC Multimedia**
Dev **Supermassive Games**

The Eleventh Doctor and River Song team up to take on familiar baddies like the Daleks, the Silence, and the Cybermen in a side-scrolling action platformer based on the *Doctor Who* television series.

Warriors Orochi 3

Format **PSN** ETA **March** Pub **Tecmo Koei** Dev **Omega Force**

After a powerful enemy kills many of the heroes of the Three Kingdoms, the survivors travel through time to save the fallen and build a new army with the aid of crossover warriors such as Ryu Hayabusa and Achilles. We imagine diplomacy isn't an option at this point.

Aliens: Colonial Marines

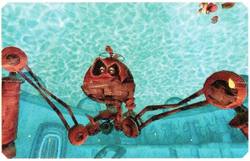
Format **PS3** ETA **Q3** Pub **Sega** Dev **Gearbox Software**

Plan on bringing a friend when taking on *Aliens: Colonial Marines*, because without a little help we may never see the other side of our deadly mission to return to LV-426 and rid the galaxy of the Xenomorphs. We do look forward to killing them, however.

Port Royale 3

Format **PSN** ETA **Q2** Pub/Dev **Kalypso Media**

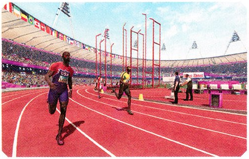
What do lawless pirates and industrious traders have in common? Well, not a lot aside from a thirst for money, battles on the high seas for wealth and glory, and the fact that *Port Royale 3's* single-player campaign lets us play as either, or a combination of both.



Rayman 3 HD

Format **PSN** ETA **March** Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Ubisoft Paris**

Rayman Origins won PTOM's Best Platformer award. Find out where all that gaming goodness came from as *Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc* returns in HD with Trophies and delicious new bonus content. We gotta say, Rayman and Globox look so fly at 60 fps.



London 2012

Format **PS3** ETA **June** Pub **Sega** Dev **Sega**

Being a real-life Olympic athlete requires dedication, perseverance, and years of rigorous training. Of course, we want nothing to do with all that nonsense. We'd rather go for the gold while sitting on our couch with a controller firmly in our grasp.

Sleeping Dogs

Format **PS3** ETA **Q3** Pub **Square Enix** Dev **United Front**

Previously canceled by Activision then acquired by Square Enix, *True Crime: Hong Kong* has a new name: *Sleeping Dogs*. A super fancy live-action trailer accompanied the new game's reveal and we gotta say we'd be psyched for a *Sleeping Dogs* movie as well.

Gut Reaction

What's strong and what's wrong

▲ Solid Port

Metal Gear Solid HD Collection is coming to PS Vita! As if we needed *more* reasons to buy a Vita.

▲ OMG I <3 U Garrus!

A *Mass Effect* Datapad app is coming to iPads and will allow players to access Codex entries, but more importantly, we'll receive messages from the characters.

▲ Huzzah Hirai!

Former SCEA head Kazuo Hirai is taking over as Sony's new CEO after Howard Stringer stepped down.

▼ What's Next?

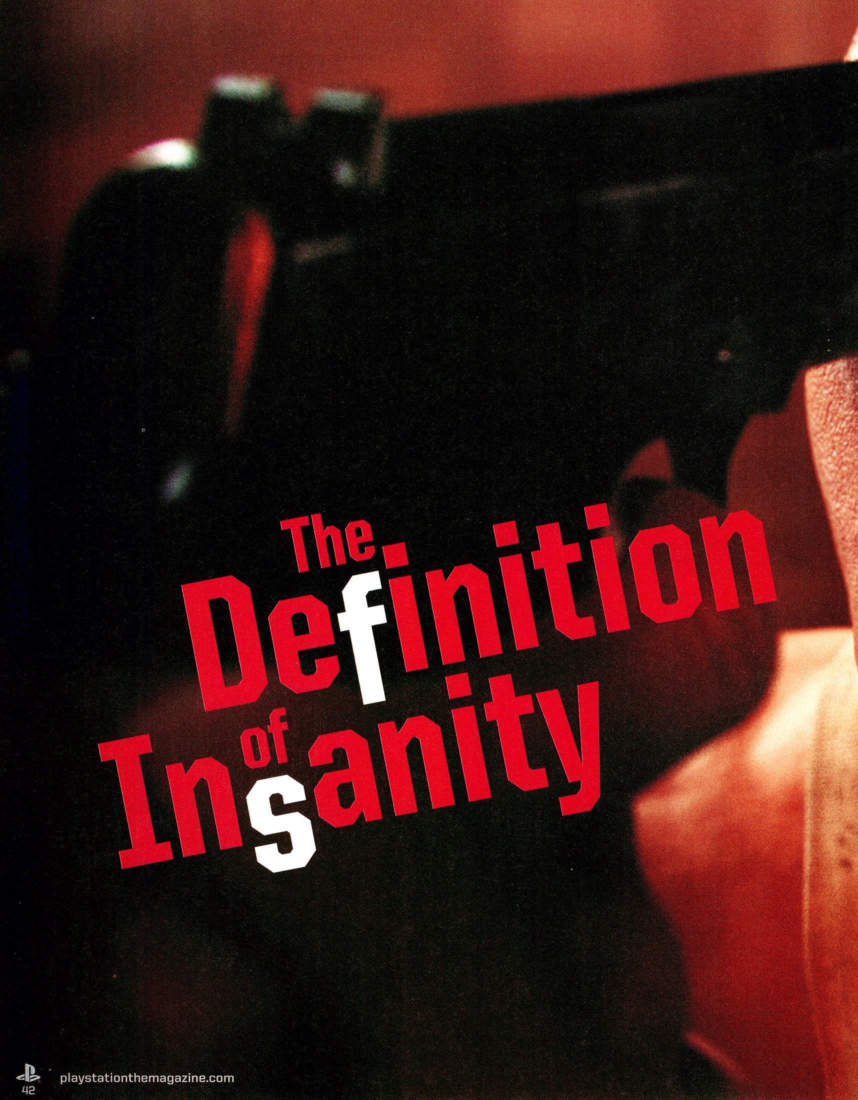
David Jaffe, co-founder of Eat Sleep Play, is leaving the company he helped build.

▼ Vita Weirdness

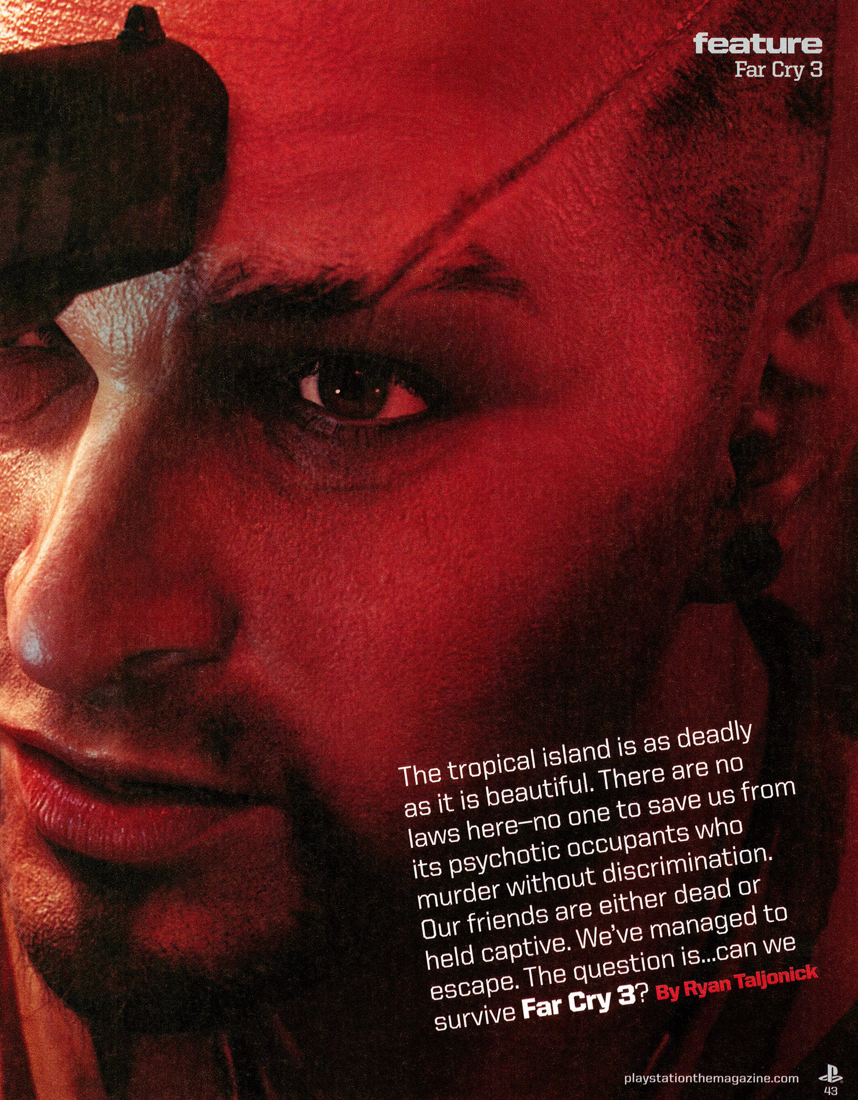
The charger plug fits into Vita either way but only charges when the PlayStation logo is facing forward. We have no idea why either.

▼ Killzone Killed?

An HD remake of the first *Killzone* has been "delayed indefinitely."

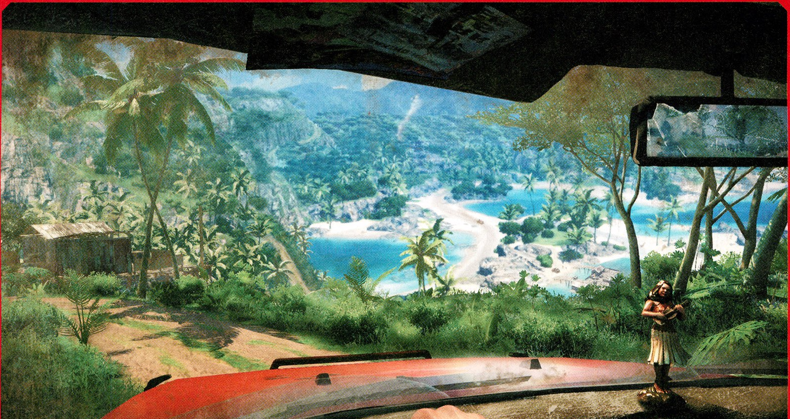


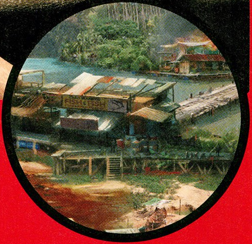
The Definition of Insanity



The tropical island is as deadly as it is beautiful. There are no laws here—no one to save us from its psychotic occupants who murder without discrimination. Our friends are either dead or held captive. We've managed to escape. The question is…can we survive **Far Cry 3**? **By Ryan Taljonick**

Format **PS3** ETA **TBD 2012** Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Ubisoft Montreal**





Don't let the quaint little shanty towns fool you—this place isn't safe.

The underwater scene before us looks as though it's been ripped straight from a travel brochure. The ocean is an innocent shade of blue, the type of natural color that can only exist outside the defiling touch of man. Schools of fish teem along the coral reef nearby, and subaquatic plants sway to the rhythm of the waves up above. For a moment we think we've found paradise.

Then everything changes. A gunshot rings out from the dock up ahead, and a body crashes into the water right in front of us. The beautiful blue of the sea turns a menacing shade of red, and we quietly surface near the base of the dock. A man stands on top the structure, holding a gun to the head of the blindfolded hostage kneeling before him. The prisoner whimpers and begs for mercy.

His captor replies with a squeeze of the trigger.

The gunman laughs, sadistic and maniacal, before turning around and walking away. We take the opportunity to strike. Sneaking up behind him, we snag the knife from his belt, turn him around, and plunge it deep into his chest. The look on his face is one of surprise and terror. We pick up his gun and step off the beach into the jungle. The journey ahead will be a perilous one. The clarity of the ocean water, the beauty of the coral reef, the gentle sound of waves lazily caressing the shoreline—all of these things mask the island's true nature. The reality settles in. We may never escape.

Welcome to the Jungle

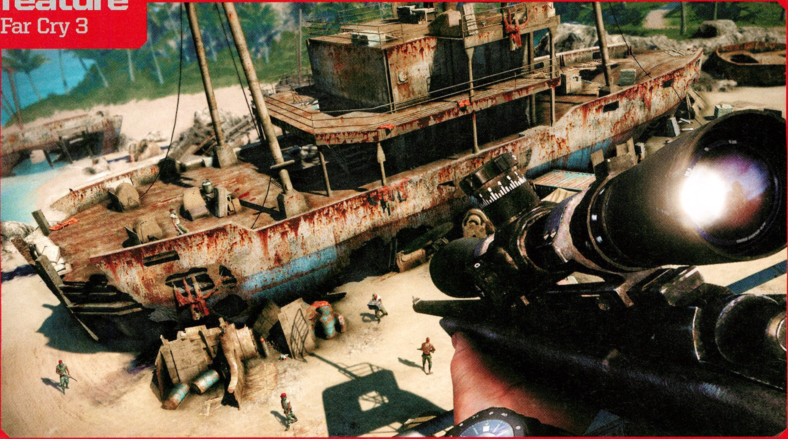
Our first impression of *Far Cry 3*—the next entry in Ubisoft's ambitious open-world first-person shooter series—is one of pure awe. The tropical world is vast; it's full of things to do and interesting characters to interact with. It's also rather dangerous.

"For us, we want you to fight to survive on an island of insanity," says producer Dan Hay. "It had to be gritty, it had to be real, it had to be raw, it had to be insane, and we want that to touch everything that we talk about in the game." Indeed, from the opening moments of our demo, the duality of beauty and brutality is immediately apparent. Armed sociopaths rule the island, blindfolding and executing civilians and travelers at will. We don't know who they are or what their motives are.

Vaas, the goons' charismatic and demented leader, commands his subjects through fear. His lackeys know that to cross him would mean consequences worse than death. He's an absolute lunatic, the perfect embodiment of the madness that permeates everything and everyone we'll encounter in *Far Cry 3*. The overarching theme should definitely add a sense of cohesiveness to the game's 30-plus hour campaign. "[We created] different characters and different brands of insanity," Hay says. "We want different rabbit holes for you to go down as you experience [the game]. It's almost what we call a 'mosaic of dysfunction' as you meet these characters and you travel across the island." The presence of Vaas and his thugs creates a jarring juxtaposition between the gorgeous, lifelike tropical setting and the atrocities occurring there. It's a crazy place, to be sure, populated by even crazier personalities sculpted by the island's isolation and lawlessness.

"We didn't set out to make *Far Cry 3* on an island, it kind of found us," says Hay. "It felt

Our first impression of *Far Cry 3*—the next entry in Ubisoft's ambitious open-world first-person shooter series—is one of **pure awe.**



"There's no 911, you can't call mom, nobody's coming to help you." *—Dan Hay, Producer*

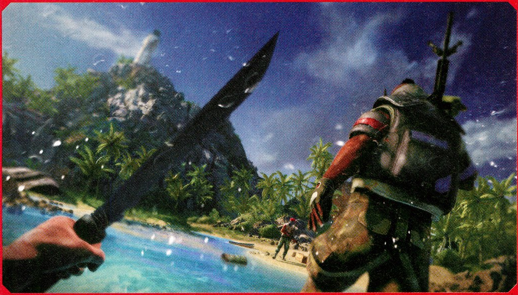
natural. We knew that we wanted it to be beautiful, it had to be stunning, it had to be exotic, it had to invite you to discover it. Where the island really works for us is that it's remote, it's cut off. There's no 911, you can't call mom, nobody's coming to help you. You break your leg here, you better like pain, because there's nobody to set the bone." Surviving its many dangers will be no easy feat, especially considering our protagonist, Jason Brody, isn't trained in the use of firearms. He's just an average guy caught in an extreme situation.

Adapt or Die

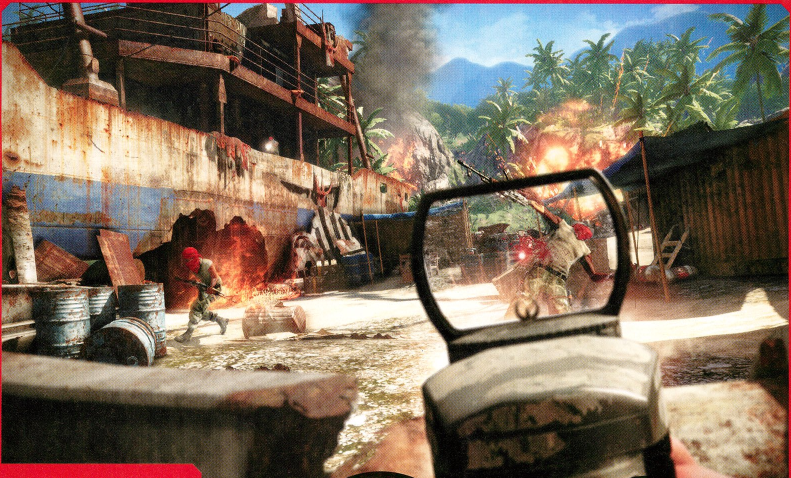
Far Cry 3's plot begins in the same way many B-grade horror flicks do: a backpacking trip gone wrong. Jason and his friends are young, full of confidence, and eager to explore the world—unfortunately they chose to explore a place that isn't exactly friendly. Naturally, they're captured and brutally victimized. Jason escapes by sheer luck. "He's a regular guy, he's not a super-soldier, he's not trying to save the world. He's just trying to survive the next five minutes," says Hay.

In our demo, Jason's been stranded on the island for three days. He's starting to get the hang of enduring the beautiful but deadly jungle. His immediate goal, outside of survival, is to find his friend Vince. After stealing a rifle from the enemy near the docks, we discover a beached, gutted ship in the distance. It's rusty. Large chunks of the hull have been either destroyed or removed. We don't know how long it's been here, but the ship is heavily guarded. Suddenly we receive a call through a transmitter radio we picked up earlier. A mysterious man named Willis is on the other line—he says if we can disable the descrambler on the beached ship (named *Medusa*), he can help us find Vince.

First, we scope out the guards near the ship with Jason's digital camera. Snapping photos of enemies "tags" them, a feature comparable to the tagging mechanics in tactical shooters like *Rainbow Six*. Once tagged, enemies are



We can use the water to our advantage by swimming through it to stay out of sight.



The first-person cover system is easy to use, allowing us to peek over objects without getting hung up.

Castaways

Lead animation director **Robert Purdy** introduces us to *Far Cry 3's* cast

Jason
"We wanted Jason to not be the super-soldier. I find it really interesting, the scenario of 'what would an average person do in an extreme situation?' This is why I think Jason being somebody who, let's say, is not familiar with guns, but from our standpoint, he's watched lots of action movies, he knows which end goes where, he probably knows where the magazine goes, you know what I mean? He's probably played first-person shooters. So guns are not new to him, it's not like you picked up something you've never seen before, you're familiar with how they work just by observing."

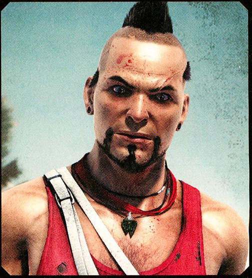
Vaas
"Vaas is probably a manifestation of all of us, in a way. Imagine if I grew up [in Montreal] and I had a tough life—the person I'm going to be when I'm 30 or whatever is going to be vastly different than if I had a similar upbringing in, say, Somalia. The thing is, Vaas is one incarnation of what we all could be. He's a product of his environment. But with that, even though you have this environment, he's got a certain makeup himself that is going to create a different result. He just happens to be a bit of an alpha male but on the very dark side."

Doctor Earnhardt
"The doctor is another end of the spectrum [of insanity]. Where Vaas is very overt and brutal, the doctor has had something happen to him that makes him, I guess, retreat into his mind. He's found this place where people will let him be. But there's something that's happened to him that he's coping with, and he's chosen to try to erase it from his mind by experimenting with various drugs."

Robert Purdy

Into the Mind of Madness

Actor **Michael Mando** talks about playing Vaas



How did you land the role of Vaas?
"When I first auditioned for Ubisoft, the character [was written] as being 6'6", 300 pounds, sociopathic, stoic, unemotional. I had the choice to pick from about eight accents. They didn't really know what they wanted. So I gave them the complete opposite of what they were looking for. And obviously I didn't get the part...but a few weeks later I got a call from my agent saying, 'Ubisoft liked your audition so much, they're actually interested in creating a small character in the game based on the audition that you've done. They want to bring you into this [motion capture] room where they're going to ask you to improvise and try to create this character.'"

What was involved in helping Ubisoft build a new Vaas from the ground up?
"I was asked all kinds of questions in the [motion capture] room as the character, with the accent and everything that I had brought in for that audition. The questions would be like, 'How would this character pick up a girl? How would he deal with rejection? Tell a joke as the character. Nobody's laughing. How would you react?' So I had about four hours of improvisation to do as the character. At the time, the character was called 'Lupo,' which means 'wolf' in Italian. The design of the character was different from what I look like. He was a little bit heavier, he was heavy-footed, he had a beard and a facial structure that were very different. So when we did the performance, the movements that I was doing with the character didn't match the way the character was physically. So they told me, 'Thank you very much,' and that was the end of it. But then I get a call a few months later from my agent and she says, 'They want to see you, and this time the character looks like you. Physically, facially. They're basing it on you as closely as they can, so they're not going to have a performance capture problem.' Lucien Soulban wrote the speech that she sent to me and it's called 'The Definition of Insanity.' I fell in love with it. And the character was now called Vaas."

How would you describe him?
"He's a pretty intense, explosive character, and he's a lot of fun to play because he's one of those people who doesn't differentiate between what he feels, what he says, and what he does."

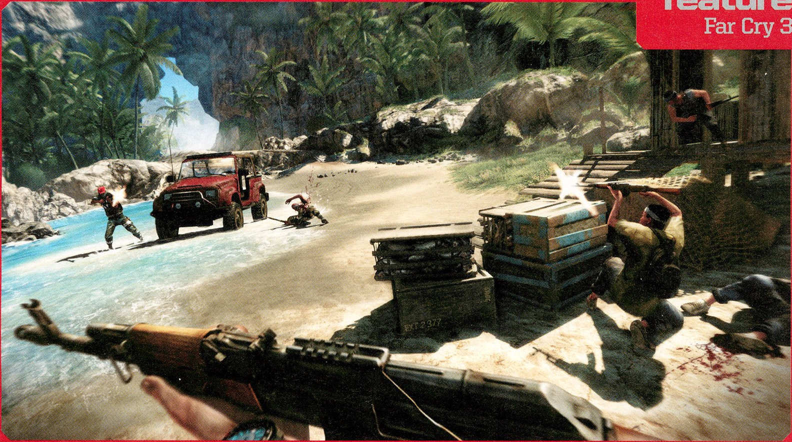
Do you consider Vaas to be a villain?
"Personally, no, I don't. With Vaas, it's really not about the rage and the anger and the intensity and the explosiveness. It's about all that amount of pain that's right under the surface. Once you get a feel for that, once you understand it as an actor and you make it your own, then the rage and the insanity is just an extension of all that pain knifing at him since he was born. All the stuff that he's lived through."

Any routines for getting into character?
"When I got the audition, I was going through something personally that helped me get in there fast. I hadn't done him for about a month, and I came back to do it. I couldn't find it right away. And I realized how high his adrenaline is. So I started running around, doing pushups, taking about 30 seconds to get into it."

With Vaas and his thugs in control of the island, no one is safe—even the locals.

visible even from behind cover, their silhouettes lighting up a dark shade of gray. The benefit? Tagging allows us to strategize our approach to any situation. We stealthily creep toward the ship as lush vegetation rustles beneath our feet. A lone enemy stands where the beach meets the jungle. We eliminate him with a silent takedown before crouching behind a stack of barrels (thankfully not the red explosive kind). We *could* choose to silently take out the guards in the area, but we decide to go in with guns blazing.

Our decision is nearly fatal due to Jason's combat inexperience. He's no firearms expert, and it shows in the way he initially holds his guns askew, shooting awkwardly, with the result being lots of recoil. Thankfully, his abilities can be improved over the course of the game. We can increase his weapon proficiencies by allocating skill points, earned by leveling up as we kill enemies and



Like in *Far Cry 2*, fire spreads organically, destroying everything in its path.

complete quests. Yet labeling *Far Cry 3* as an RPG would be a mistake—it looks and plays like a shooter, simply employing RPG elements to emulate Jason's natural growth as he becomes more accustomed to handling weaponry and gadgets. Guns won't magically get more powerful as we use skill points. Instead, Jason just gets better at using them, though he can also acquire new skills. We soon witness one of these in action: After performing a takedown kill, Jason wrenches the bloodied knife from his victim and throws it with impressive precision into the neck of nearby foe. Probably not a technique anyone would realistically learn in the scope of a few days, but awesome nonetheless. Admittedly, however, seeing XP gains stamped across the screen as we accumulated kills seemed a bit obtrusive and out of place, a stark contrast to the incredible level of immersion found in *Far Cry 2*.

Deadly by Design

After taking down a patrol of thugs, we slide behind a detached piece of the ship's hull sticking out of the sand. Here we get a chance to toy around with *Far Cry 3's* new first-person cover system, which makes popping in and out of cover a breeze. Leaning Jason toward a piece of cover causes him to peek over with his weapon drawn without snapping or sticking him into place, avoiding common cover-based hang-ups. We manage to land a few lucky headshots before shooting a barrel (this one red and explosive). The result of its devastation is beautiful to behold. Like in *Far Cry 2*, fire spreads organically, destroying everything in its path—including vegetation, structures, and the gun-toting bad guys caught in the firestorm. As the fire continues to feed itself, we realize just how incredible *Far Cry 3* truly looks. From the realistic lighting that filters through the jungle canopy to the eerily real character animations and expressions, every last texture pushes the boundaries of PS3's processing power.

Equally impressive is the overhauled A.I. Enemies are no longer content to simply take cover and flank. Pockets of bad guys are charged with protecting specific territories or structures on the island, and will frequently regroup at key strategic locations and call reinforcements to bolster their numbers. Such is the case as we ascend to the top of the *Medusa* and disable the descrambler. "Get back to the *Medusa!*" we hear our enemies scream as they haul ass to our location. "If we hadn't have done that right, you wouldn't see anybody running back to the transmitter," says Hay. "You wouldn't see them fall back. What would have happened is they'd all just take cover, and you would have, like dominoes, tried to take them out." He's right. Two boatloads of reinforcements arrive on the beach, and the newcomers immediately make a beeline for their comrades. Luckily, a conveniently placed machine gun sits nearby. We fire upon the stragglers and are astounded by their unexpected reactions to our assault. Some quickly dive into cover, others attempt to flank and overrun us. A few even flee for their lives and get a backside full of bullets. None of this is scripted; it's all a natural reaction to our actions.

Insanatorium

With the descrambler destroyed, Willis gets a fix on Vince's location—but first Jason needs

some medical attention. Willis directs us to the rather peculiar Doctor Earnhardt to seek help. We hop in a jeep and drive to the doctor's location. Anyone who's played *Far Cry 2* will have a good idea of what to expect when it comes to traversing the island. Automobiles, hang gliders, boats—all are viable options for getting around, and the devs hinted at pilotable aircraft and a fast travel mechanic to cut down on travel time.

We arrive at the doctor's place and step foot inside his greenhouse. The building is dilapidated, overgrown with mold and plants. Petri dishes sit on the table nearby, each filled with colorful mushrooms and powdery substances. "See anything you fancy?" an unknown voice asks. "I like the red ones myself. The purple will give you a lift on a gray day. But not the yellows. Don't take them, they're liable to kill you. Dr. Earnhardt here... or in and out as the case may be." The man

Automobiles, hang gliders, boats—all are viable options for getting around.

With rocket launchers in their possession, enemies pretty much have the island under lockdown.

Third Time's a Charm

A critical look at the mechanics of *Far Cry 2* and *Far Cry 3*

Malaria

Malaria in *Far Cry 2* added a handicap to our character that we were forced to address. We can recall the frustrating frequency with which we had to embark on special missions to obtain more medicine to curb the blinding effects of the disease. Thankfully we won't have to worry about the ailment now that we're out of the Savanna. **Status: Cut**

Experience points and levels

The Ubisoft devs wouldn't go into detail about the new leveling system in *Far Cry 3*, but we know taking out bad guys and completing quests rewards us with experience points. Upon leveling up, we are rewarded with a skill point, though we didn't get a look at how these are used and in what ways Jason's abilities are improved. **Status: New**

Weapon jamming

We actually enjoyed having weapons jam or explode in our hands in *Far Cry 2*. Sure, the effects might have occurred a bit too often, but the mechanic made every firefight dynamic and unpredictable. There was nothing quite like lining up an enemy in our crosshairs and pulling the trigger only to hear a heart-sinking "click." **Status: Cut**

Day/night cycles

One of our fondest memories of *Far Cry 2* was using the cover of night to sneak into an enemy camp and catch its occupants by surprise. Day and night cycles (as well as drastic changes in weather) will remain in *Far Cry 3*, adding a sense of realism and strategy to the experience. **Status: Intact**

Gathering and crafting

Lead game designer Jaime Keen mentioned during an interview that there will be some sort of gathering system in which players obtain plants to create drugs of varying effects. He also suggested hunting the jungle's wildlife may be worthwhile. Perhaps we'll see a crafting system? **Status: New**

Procedural fire

Far Cry 2 had some of the best fire mechanics in all of gaming. We could start a brush fire with a flare gun and watch it spread from grass to structures, leaving destruction in its wake. The fire in *Far Cry 3* has been further refined and is more realistic than ever. **Status: Intact**

Fast travel

It's safe to say we spent nearly as much time driving around as we did killing bad guys in *Far Cry 2*, and while we dug exploring the world, we often wished our character had the power of teleportation. Now we don't have to worry so much about driving for 30 minutes to reach an objective: *Far Cry 3* employs a fast travel system while retaining traditional traversal methods. **Status: New**

Co-op multiplayer

Far Cry 2's multiplayer was rather generic, but we've seen screens of other characters shooting at Vaas' thugs alongside Jason. Whether these are actual players or just NPCs akin to *Far Cry 2*'s "buddies" is unknown. It's possible we'll see a cooperative option in *Far Cry 3*, though we're not sure how it would work. **Status: Unconfirmed**

who greets us looks and sounds more like a mad scientist than a medical practitioner, but he fixes our wounds and hooks us up with some health-filling syringes. "Into the thick of it with Vaas and his pirates?" he asks. "He self-medicates, unfortunately."

He's a curiously cracked old man. He smiles, gazing off into nothingness, lost in the tangles of his mind. Then his smile transforms into a somber frown. Some sort of internal darkness weighs heavily on his face. After a moment his trance breaks and he's once again aware of our presence. He requests a favor in exchange for his medical services: He's after a very specific type of mushroom, which can only be found in a nearby cave. We reluctantly accept and make our way to the objective. What begins as a mundane fetch quest quickly becomes an interesting and welcome break from the action. Navigating the cave is simple enough, and we soon locate the fungi we were sent to acquire—but the mushrooms are emitting some kind of hallucinogenic gas. Our vision turns hazy, creating a very *Alice in Wonderland* vibe. The voices of Jason's friends (who are now likely dead) reverberate through the shallow tunnel. Flowers bloom from out of nowhere. The world slows. A baby cries. A door materializes before us. Each time we reach for the knob, it moves back, just outside of our reach. Everything is out of our reach. The door teases Jason, a parallel to the chaos his life has become. We try again and again and are finally successful. That's when Jason regains lucidity. We emerge from the cave to discover day has turned to night.

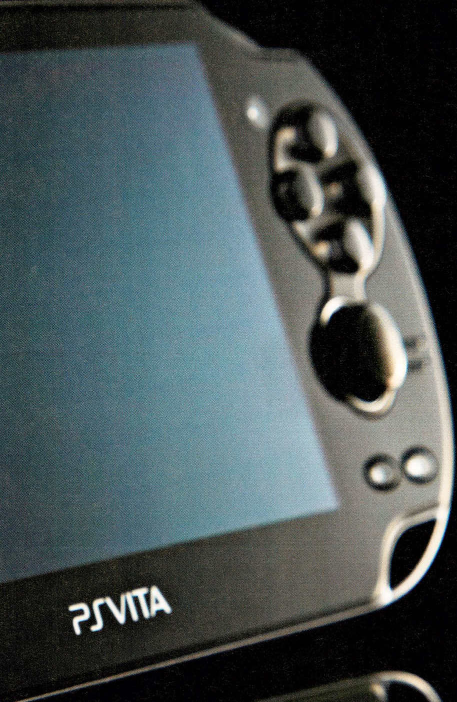
Waterlogged

In the closing moments of our demo, we infiltrate the large ship on which Vince is supposedly held. Like our experience at the *Medusa*, the firefights here are frantic and unpredictable. As we descend into the bowels of the ship, Willis attempts to contact us. We can barely discern his words over the loud crack of gunfire. "Dammit, where the hell is Vince?!" Jason screams as we take cover on a catwalk. The last of Vaas' thugs goes down after a shotgun blast rearranges his ribcage. Finally, Willis comes through loud and clear on the transmitter. "Jason! There's a bomb on board!" Too late—his warning comes as the final hatch creaks open. Red, threatening lights wrap a cylindrical bomb, blinking to the high-pitched squeal of an audible timer. "Holy sh–t" Jason mumbles. We turn around and run. Seconds pass. An explosion rocks the ship. The hull buckles from the force of the blast and water floods in. The boat is sinking faster than we can escape it.

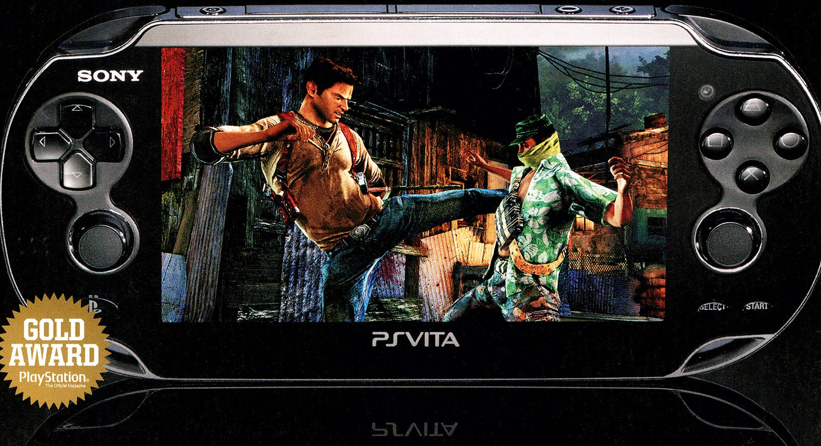
Then something unexpected happens. The sound of folding metal and gushing water gives way to music. At first it consists of chimes. The melody crescendos and vocal harmonies are added to the mix. It's a chilling, psychedelic score, reinforcing the theme of insanity. Jason gasps for air and the song lyrics kick in. *Dream, how I dream to feel.* We frantically search for an exit. *And everything will fill with light. A golden sun would fool this night.* Our vision begins to go black. *And all that is and ever was. Begin again. Begin again.* We climb out of a shredded hole in the hull, swimming out into the ocean. The cold darkness of the water, the biting sharpness of the coral reef—the true nature of the island reveals itself at last. *Begin again. Begin again,* the song echoes. We nearly reach the water's surface. Our vision fades completely. The reality settles in. We may never escape.

SONY

First Wave



The PlayStation Vita has officially arrived and with it comes the largest, most robust launch lineup in Sony's history. But more choice means tougher decisions: What do we buy first? What's the best of the bunch? PTOM dives into Vita's first releases for the definitive answers.



GOLD AWARD
PlayStation
The Official Magazine

Pub **SCEA** Dev **Sony Bend** Price **$49.99** ESRB **Teen**

Uncharted Golden Abyss

Drake's little big adventure almost hits PS3's heights

PROS
Nolan North as Drake makes this feel authentic, and it has plenty of laughs and emotion to back up the action.

CONS
Uncharted games typically sparkle all the way through, but there are sections where *Golden Abyss* is just treading water.

There are two ways to look at *Golden Abyss*. It's either the *Uncharted* that Naughty Dog isn't making and a cynical exploitation of the franchise, one that shows a lack of top-level investment and spells the end of Western civilization as we know it...*or* it's the one that still stars Nolan North as Drake and maintains the groundbreaking production practices initiated by Naughty Dog. Since the presence of its charismatic star highlights the fact that the game is as character and story-focused as ever, we vote for the latter.

The cynics do have one fair point, though: As Nintendo brings its big boys out to play on 3DS, why isn't Sony getting its A-team involved? The real truth, as always, falls somewhere between the two extremes. The absence of Naughty Dog is a legitimate worry—despite Sony's talk about developer support, its own team has found better things to do with *The Last of Us*—but Sony Bend has handheld experience and (perhaps sensibly) follows the *Uncharted* template while risking only occasional flourishes.

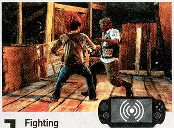
Actually, Drake's new caretakers deserve more credit than that. They've successfully transferred the finest experience on PS3 to a new machine—no doubt with strict instructions to make full use of all its eclectic functionality, no matter how logically it can be applied. And the worst one could say about the raft of new controls is that some of them waft past like mild air—the touchscreen quick-time events or the finger-slide auto traversing, for instance, add little or nothing but don't really detract from the experience either.

There's also beam balancing of the kind seen in the very first *Uncharted*, back when we were all still telling ourselves that Sixaxis motion controls were going to be the next big thing. It's just as pointless and irritating here as it was four years ago. But! The occasional bit of tightrope walking can easily be forgiven when stacked against the excellent work done with Vita's controls elsewhere. Persistent niggles from the PS3 games have been ironed out. Finding the sweet spot to engage with a ledge or to pick up a certain weapon from a cluttered floor is no longer a problem since we can simply tap the ledge or the weapon to grab it.

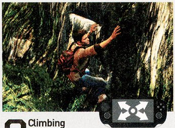
> This Drake feels just like the Drake we already know and love

Getting In Touch with Nathan Drake

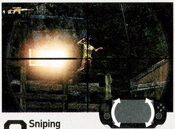
Four ways in which Vita changes how we play Uncharted



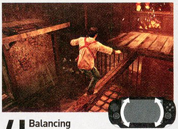
1 Fighting The combat animates in pretty much the same way as the main series games on PS3, but now we can tap enemies to smash them over the head rather than pressing a button. It's actually something we came to miss elsewhere. Melee quick-time events take the form of arrows we must trace out across the screen.



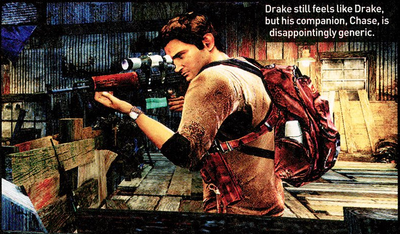
2 Climbing This initially feels like a nicely done but ultimately pointless addition, but eventually convinced us and became intuitive. Here, instead of thumping X mindlessly, we can stroke along a series of handholds, which then sparkle a bit before Drake shimmies along them. Necessary? Nah. It's a pretty slick addition for when our thumbs got lazy though.



3 Sniping This, to our surprise, is the best use of Vita's many new control interfaces. The rifle can be aimed with the tilt sensors (it actually works surprisingly well), and best of all, even though it sounds sort of lame, the scope can be zoomed with the back touchpad. It became so easy that it's another thing we missed once back on PS3.

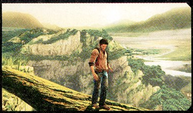


4 Balancing This one isn't so welcome. As if in ironic celebration of the widely derided Sixaxis controls of the original *Uncharted*—and the boringly contrived sections created just for them—*Golden Abyss* features wobbly, oh-hold-me-up balancing moments where we cross beams that are only there to balance on. We could do without it.



Drake still feels like Drake, but his companion, Chase, is disappointingly generic.

It looks fantastic in motion, if not *quite* as good as we're used to.



Nice Arsenal

The weapons in general get a good deal. The sniper rifle can be aimed with the tilt sensors—and actually *aimed* rather than lurched in the general direction of enemies. It's perhaps still easier to use the sticks, but the sensors are often quicker at picking out enemies against a big open landscape, and whichever aiming system set up is chosen, the ability to zoom in and out by stroking a fingertip either up or down the back touchscreen is intuitive, simple, and better than any prior way of doing it. Touch controls also make lever-pulling, panel-rotating puzzling more immediate and fun and allow for the inclusion of a whole new series of photo collectibles and jigsaw teasers.

Rest assured the traditional controls hold up very well too, with the dual analog sticks (we gave them a sensitivity boost in the options) perfectly adequate for fast, accurate shooting after a little acclimatization. And, despite the lack of Naughty Dog scripting talent Amy Hennig, this Drake feels just like the Drake we already know and love, with the same quips, quirks, and engaging vulnerability. Unfortunately, his new girl Chase struggles to define herself as anything other than a generic follow-along, especially given the prequel scenario. She clearly doesn't figure much in his future, but things are much more assured once Sully turns up just past the halfway mark.

The end result? The story, though a bit generic, retains that engrossing, adventurous *Uncharted* feel, and the gameplay takes its major cues from Naughty Dog's existing work. That makes this a highly playable game that's not markedly inferior to the PS3 games and, at its best, feels like a truly authentic *Uncharted* experience. Given the fact it does that while catering to all the demands of a new system, *Golden Abyss* is a very impressive achievement.

PlayStation The Official Magazine
9

JAMES COATES

SONY
Toggle Camera
Replay
Skip
Remaining 416y
1W
240y
POWER 100%
PSVITA

Pub **SCEA** Dev **Clap Hanz**
Price **$39.99** ESRB **Everyone**

Hot Shots Golf World Invitational

Over-par on innovation

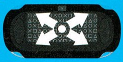
As usual for a *Hot Shots Golf* game, *World Invitational* is dead easy to pick up and play (we were hitting scorching drives in no time), and the cartoony look really works. But it also has no creative spark, and its uses of the new hardware innovations are painfully few and disappointingly gimmicky.

For instance, we can now switch the perspective and freely control our view by tilting the Vita, but this isn't half as useful as it sounds. The camera becomes unstable and jumpy as it reacts to every shake of the hands. The best way to survey the course is to simply hold Triangle, which pans up for a birds' eye view. Where's the rear touchscreen functionality to control shot power? Where's the touchscreen aiming?

To be fair, the golf here remains decent, with an accessible shot system that had us hitting regular birdies within a few hours. As a handheld title, it succeeds in providing bite-sized chunks of entertainment. If, however, you're looking to impress people with all the things Vita can do, you'd best look elsewhere. **JAMES COATES**

PlayStation The Official Magazine **6**

Only on Vita



Vita can be used as a "window" onto the course. Aim Vita down to see the ball; aim it up and to the left to see the distant flag.

Shinobido 2
Revenge of Zen

Pub **Namco Bandai** Dev **Acquire**
Price **$39.99** ESRB **Mature**

As much fun as quietly knifing a guard can be, it gets old when all challenge is removed. In *Shinobido 2*, there's no consequence for breaking cover, as we can just run away for a few seconds and wait for guard patterns to reset. Once we discovered that rooftop sprints into jumping executions would see us through most situations, it became easy to be as loud as a one-man band and still walk away without trouble. Dimwitted enemies and bland looks also make for a subpar experience. **JC**

PlayStation The Official Magazine **5**

Michael Jackson
The Experience HD

Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Ubisoft** Price **$39.99** ESRB **Everyone**

With a great touchscreen comes a great responsibility...to release a rhythm game. Players swipe and tap the screen to classics like "Smooth Criminal" and "Thriller," completing challenges to unlock special effects, costumes, and higher difficulties. Because all songs are available from the start, *The Experience* failed to motivate us as effectively as other music titles. Though it's a quick source of musical fun, this rhythm game falls short of its price point—the only difference between this and the $5 app version is the playlist. **ANNE LEWIS**

PlayStation The Official Magazine **4**

F1 2011

Pub **Codemasters** Dev **Sumo Digital**
Price **$39.99** ESRB **Everyone**

This is not a port but rather a new game built around the PS3's template by dev Sumo Digital, and it captures a lot of what makes Codemasters' games great. While not quite as pretty, it's quick and smooth, and the A.I. cars are fine, if not that fast. Steering and handling is a tiny bit sluggish, but we'll take that over twitchy any day. Plus, the throttle and brake can be mapped to the rear touchpanel or the shoulder bumpers, and both feel better than using the face buttons. Newcomers will find the addictive Challenge mode useful, as it's way more fun than practice sessions. **JC**

PlayStation The Official Magazine **8**

SONY
PS VITA

SONY
SELECT START
PS VITA

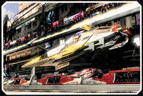
Head to Head

ModNation Racers RT vs Wipeout 2048

It's plucky tortoise vs. futuristic hare in this battle between Vita's racers

CONCEPT

LittleBigPlanet on four wheels. The tiny material men may have been jettisoned, but *ModNation* rocks the same sparkling creation tools. Plus, it packs in the most exhaustive course designer we've ever seen.



Quantum levitation condensed into racing form. Or, in non-science speak: hyper-fast futuristic hovercraft grand prix goodness. Being the year 2048, this acts as *Wipeout's* origin point.

GRAPHICS

Blighted with pop-up and blur, *Road Trip* seems to have smeared Vaseline over Vita's incredi-OLED screen. Quite the achievement, seeing as *Wipeout* looks so incredibly sharp.

Every inch like a top-tier PS3 game. Boasts catwalk-worthy good looks that easily rival PSN's *Wipeout HD*, with searingly pretty lighting, a carbonite-solid framerate, and gorgeous colors.

GAMEPLAY

Off the track, creation is playful enough to make the touchscreen shine. Painting tracks with your finger or dragging the sun to change time is damn satisfying. On it, mean power-ups make for joyless chaos.

Favorites
Mod Postcards

Constantly thrilling, breathless races are punctuated with devilish course design and thoughtful weapons. Make sure you change the default controls to "Wipeout" for the full tactical air-braking experience.

LIFESPAN

If your creative juices flow freely at the thought of making beardy Gandalf drivers and Mordor-meets-Nürburgring courses, then lifespan is limited only by your imagination. If not, the erratic karting soon bores.

Place Props
Scene Props

The main campaign lasts upwards of ten hours, while online races and time trials should add plenty of ribeye-tasty meat to that number. Later cups take ages to earn gold medals on, thanks to the lethal A.I.

VERDICT

LOSER

Intuitive touchscreen tools make Vita's featureset sing, so it's a shame much of this good work is marred by poor handling and cheaty A.I. Sadly, *ModNation's* creative side trumps the racing.

PlayStation. **6**

WINNER

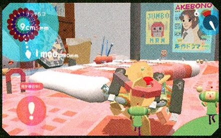
PlayStation. **8**

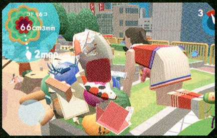
Faster than Usain Bolt with rockets on his feet and a perfect display of Vita's technical heft. Avoid the new controls and this is as addictive a racer as you'll find on a handheld.

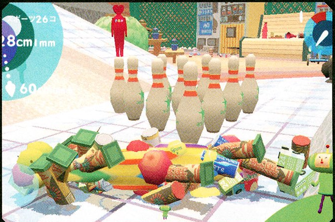
Pub **Namco Bandai** Dev **Namco Bandai** Price **$29.99** ESRB **Everyone 10+**

Touch My Katamari

The weird world of Katamari finally stretches itself







▲ Squeezing between the bowling pins is made simple thanks to Vita's touch controls in *Touch My Katamari*.

The concept hasn't changed: The tiny Prince must impress his disparaging dad, the King of All Cosmos, by rolling items of increasing size and surrealism into a worthy ball of junk. Start little, grow large—it's the *Katamari* way. This time, however, we can also stretch and squeeze the ball using the Vita's rear panel. A low and wide Katamari can pick up more stuff, while a tall, thin one fits through gaps and climbs steps. The delightfully deranged soundtrack swells and fades in the process, too.

The thumbsticks feel sublime, while the shoulder buttons make it easy to switch directions and to jump. It's very helpful since most stages (many recycled) are punishingly strict, requiring us to grow our Katamari to a certain size within a time limit or to pick up or avoid certain items.

We can download new stages and items, or unlock them by collecting sweets, baby faces, and Spirit Fans—it's a little complicated, but the option is there. We'd have liked a few more open-ended stages and less pop-up, but *Touch My Katamari* is still eccentric and bursting with charm. **JAMES COATES**

PlayStation The Official Magazine **8**

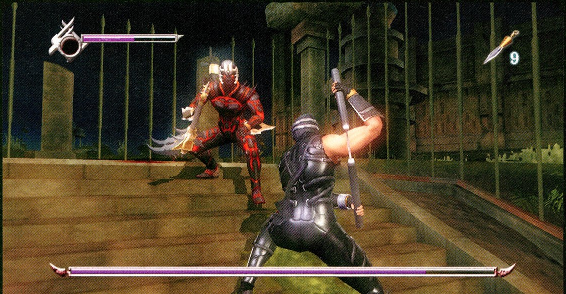
Only on Vita

Pushing and pulling on the touchpanel stretches and compresses the Katamari to squeeze it into small gaps or to cover wide spaces.

Pub **Tecmo Koei** Dev **Team Ninja**
Price **$39.99** ESRB **Mature**

Ninja Gaiden Sigma Plus

There's no such thing as too many ninjas



▲ We've played it before, sure, but the experience still holds up after all these years.

Tecmo has certainly gotten a lot of mileage out of its 2004 *Ninja Gaiden* reboot. What started as *Ninja Gaiden* on the original Xbox became *Ninja Gaiden Black* on 360 and later *Ninja Gaiden Sigma* on PS3. Now the same experience has arrived on Vita with a handful of additions but no real discernable updates beyond what was already added to the PS3 version—which is to say, more health drops and a slightly more cooperative camera, both of which are essential given the game's demanding difficulty.

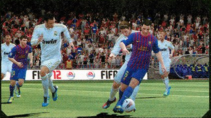
As far as Vita-specific additions are concerned, tapping the touchscreen now pulls the camera into a first-person view that's then controlled by tilting the Vita itself. It's clever and occasionally useful when aiming but ultimately not a major boon to the game. Still, the core experience—one of total ninja badassery and some the finest hack-'n'-slash mechanics this side of *Devil May Cry*—remains a true test of skill and an addictively satisfying gameplay experience that even still looks pretty sharp, considering. Truly great games, it seems, never grow old. **SCOTT BUTTERWORTH**

PlayStation The Official Magazine **8**

FIFA Soccer

GOLD AWARD PlayStation The Official Magazine

Pub **EA Sports** Dev **EA Canada** Price **$39.99** ESRB **Everyone**

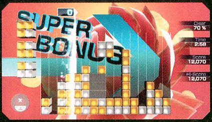


Apologies to *Uncharted*, but *FIFA Soccer* could turn out to be Vita's killer app. Its gameplay is nearly identical to the PS3 standard setter, and the franchise's spot-on commentary and atmospheric presentation remain intact. Vita's sharp display makes it easy to follow the action, though some fancier footwork does get lost on the smaller screen. The Vita version's most notable addition is the optional touchscreen shooting and passing controls. It's intuitive, and we loved the precision it allows on tight through passes. With online capability for 11 v. 11 head-to-head matches, it's easy to imagine Vita becoming our system of choice for our footie fix. **ROGER BURCHILL**

PlayStation **10**

Lumines Electronic Symphony

Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Q Entertainment** Price **$39.99** ESRB **Everyone**

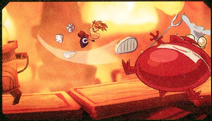


The original *Lumines* was the best puzzle game since *Tetris*, so thankfully *Electronic Symphony* doesn't change much. Touchscreen controls and unlockable gifts that can be shared between systems have been added, but what's most important is the game (featuring two colors of falling blocks set to euphoric, psychedelic electric beats) is as good as ever. The only modifications to the core game come with the addition of an experience point system that unlocks avatars with special powers and the Chain and Shuffle Blocks, which clear linked colors and shuffle things up respectively. It's by-the-book *Lumines*, and it's amazing. **HOLLANDER COOPER**

PlayStation **9**

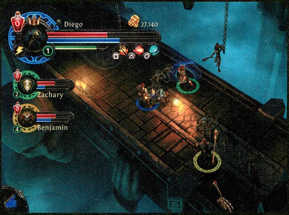
Rayman Origins

Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Ubisoft Montpellier**
Price **$39.99** ESRB **Everyone 10+**

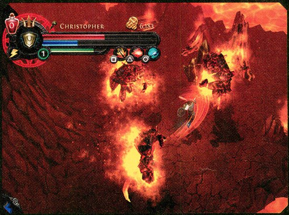


Perhaps no other game last year was as ill fated as *Rayman Origins*, Ubisoft's brilliant platformer that was doomed to launch alongside big-budget titles like *Assassin's Creed: Revelations*. Thankfully, *Origins* gets a second chance at success as a launch title for PS Vita. The handheld version of *Origins* looks stunning, losing none of the visual splendor infused in its PS3 counterpart. In fact, it feels almost built for the Vita, as levels (which are identical to those in the console version) take no more than 20 minutes to complete. They're fast-paced, challenging, and populated with new collectibles called Relics, which we snag by tapping the touchscreen. It's a small but worthwhile addition. While this version of *Origins* doesn't support multiplayer, it's still a no-brainer for our new handheld library. **RYAN TALJONICK**

PlayStation **9**



▲ Up to four players can embark on a loot-filled adventure.



Dungeon Hunter Alliance

Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Gameloft** Price **$39.99** ESRB **Teen**

As folks who love taking loot showers, we rarely need an excuse to play a dungeon crawler—especially one that supports up to four players in online or ad hoc co-op play. The PS Vita's premiere action-RPG *Dungeon Hunter: Alliance* does just that. Granted, it's a port of a PSN game that was a port of an iOS game, but it's still a decent RPG at its core. The handheld version looks just as good as the PSN counterpart and even sports some Vita-specific functionality—namely, we can use the touchscreen to cast spells, quickly open up the character menu, and swap loot on the fly.

However, *Alliance* is plagued by some rather lengthy load times, which can put the kibosh on short commute playtime. It also still suffers from poor hit detection for melee weapons, requiring multiple swings to take out enemies. Perhaps the biggest offense, however, is the Vita version of the game costs more than twice the amount of the PSN version though they're nearly identical. While not a bad game by any means, *Alliance* is hard to recommend on Vita when it can be purchased for a fraction of the cost on PS3. **RYAN TALJONICK**

PlayStation **5**

SONY
All-Round
Ground Strokes
PS VITA

Pub **Sega** Dev **Sega**
Price **$39.99** ESRB **Everyone**

Virtua Tennis 4 World Tour Edition

World Tour serves up an improved game

While *Virtua Tennis* has long been the less serious proposition to rival *Top Spin*, *VT4* on PS3 seemed oddly reluctant to let its hair down. With a linear World Tour mode restricting the between-tournament minigame madness, *VT4* was not the best of *Virtua Tennis*. Fortunately, the game works better on Vita, partly thanks to a few refinements and partly because its gameplay is more suited to a handheld.

At first glance it seems a very close port, but Sega has given players a bit more weight so they don't slide around the court anymore. We can also choose between the familiar button controls or intuitive but twitchy touchscreen inputs, and change anytime…probably back to buttons. *VT4* also benefits from Vita's lower resolution—the PS3 version's hard character models and shiny courts come out both warmer and softer.

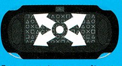
The original four seasons are joined by an exclusive bonus season, and we also get all the chicken-collecting, bomb-serving, card-dealing minigames we expected.

There are a few "VT Apps" that take advantage of the hardware, though they feel a bit throwaway. Still, it's hard to fault *VT4's* easy-entry arcade feel and rewarding career mode.

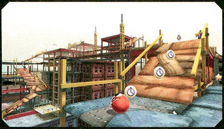
PlayStation The Official Magazine **8**

JAMES COATES

Only on Vita



Screen swipes can direct shots, but the entire setup is odd and not nearly as satisfying as *Virtua Tennis'* time-tested controls.



Little Deviants

Pub **SCEA** Dev **Bigbig Studios**
Price **$29.99** ESRB **Everyone 10+**

A colorful, cartoony collection of minigames, *Little Deviants* seems to go out of its way to introduce us to Vita's repertoire of control interfaces. Of the six mildly entertaining diversions, the most memorable were a Deviant-rolling game that had us navigate levels with hills created via the rear touchpad and an augmented-reality shooter that had us spinning in circles to shoot evil aliens out of the air. The rest of the game devolves into a mélange of tapping, tilting, and swiping. There's nothing offensive about *Little Deviants*. It's just unremarkable.

PlayStation The Official Magazine **6**

ROGER BURCHILL

Dynasty Warriors Next

Pub **Tecmo Koei** Dev **Koei** Price **$39.99** ESRB **Teen**

The Three Kingdoms haven't changed much, and a few minor additions can't keep *Dynasty Warriors* from feeling like *Dynasty Warriors*. While some touchscreen-based attacks are useful, most feel forced and unnecessary. Ambushes require swipes and taps to repel enemies, but once those pass, we're immediately back to relying on good ol' fashioned buttonmashing in true *Dynasty Warriors* fashion. Fans of the series know what they're in for, but everyone else can rest their fingers for deeper games.

PlayStation The Official Magazine **5**

ANNE LEWIS

Adrenaline
Pos 6/6
Lap 1/3

Asphalt Injection

Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Ubisoft Romania**
Price **$29.99** ESRB **Everyone 10+**

Asphalt: Injection wants so desperately to be *Burnout: Revenge*. Unfortunately, the game feels more like a cheap knockoff than a compelling successor. The boring track layouts look empty and dead, with lanes so wide that slamming opponents and drifting become pointless. The action also provides no sense of speed, even when boosting, and while the handling functions fine, it requires almost no skill. The experience improved slightly as we played but never satisfied our inner speed demons.

PlayStation The Official Magazine **5**

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

SONY
PS VITA

SONY
PS VITA

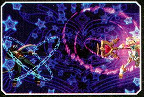
Head to Head

Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3 VS BlazBlue Continuum Shift Extend

Vita's wild and wacky 2D fighters touch gloves and knock heads

The innovation in this otherwise incredibly familiar port is touch control. Tap the opponent (front or rear panel) to slap, tap the gauge for a Hyper Combo, or...no, that's it.

CONCEPT



This superior version of Arc System Works' beat-'em-up may be the same game as PSP's *Continuum Shift II* (albeit with minor tweaks and PS3 DLC characters), but the difference in quality is night and day.

The rocket-speed three-on-three action is gorgeous, with big, bold character sprites. The art style and animation both translate well to Vita's smaller screen, especially the explosive Hyper Combos.

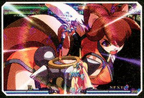
AIR COMBO!
8 HITS!

GRAPHICS

The washed-out blotches of older PSP editions make way for pin-sharp sprites and backgrounds that sparkle with life and detail. The crisp, colorful visuals really showcase Vita's screen.

Spamming the touchscreen is too easy, meaning players won't learn the techniques or improve their game. Try the excellent *Street Fighter IV* iPhone app to see how it can be done.

GAMEPLAY



The option to allocate complicated combos to the touchscreen could have proven controversial, but in practice, it's too fiddly to offer a competitive edge. The raised D-pad makes hitting diagonals a cinch.

Online worked great so long as we were near a Wi-Fi router (or else it got choppy), and it boasts uploadable replays. DLC can be shared with a PS3 copy, which should help keep us playing.

LIFESPAN

You'll have to do better than THAT, Brother. Wouldn't you rather k
you don't want to see my guts in a pile at your feet, then we're not o
equal levels of hatred...and that just wouldn't be fair...!

Online functionality seemed to work just fine in our admittedly limited experience. We've yet to experience the cross-play feature, but we know we'll be fighting PS3 owners on equal terms.

VERDICT

LOSER

An impressive port that will satisfy seasoned fighters, and though it concedes to newbies in the worst way possible, the PS3 version's addictive, colorful, frantic action remains strong here.

PlayStation. Official Magazine **7**

WINNER

PlayStation. Official Magazine **8**

Want proof Vita is more than a PSP with a second stick? This is it. *BlazBlue* is a game of precision and timing that demands a perfect port. Here, it gets one. Fighting fans will be pleased.

The best and worst DLC on PS3 and how to make it better

From rip-off new costumes to full blown story expansions, we argue the case for superior downloadable content **By Richard Cobbett**

Ever since Bethesda threw *Oblivion*'s infamous Horse Armor at us, downloadable content has been a disappointment. A few new maps, costume packs that would once have been in-game unlockables, paid-for cheats...yes there's a market for it, and no, we have no problem if you want to make Dan Hibiki fight in a hula skirt. But DLC can be better.

The cheats and costumes and map packs have come to define the market, but DLC is a chance to take a great game and build on it without the pressure of a full sequel or the kind of development costs that can bankrupt a studio if it fails. It's a place where everyone can play a little, experiment, break the rules of the game and have some fun.

Oblivion's Horse Armor was an infamous mistake, but Bethesda's follow-ups weren't much more inspired. There were new homes for our characters to live in, a short quest for Mehrunes' Razor, and the beefy but dull *Knights of the Nine* expansion. Around the same time, Ubisoft started experimenting with DLC pricing, banging out a handful of *Ghost Recon* maps for a few bucks. It was the wild west—lawless and crazy, with no real rules for what players should expect from DLC—but at least it was *interesting*. Soon after, developers learned what made the most money for the least effort: maps, cheats, and costumes.

Nobody's released an expansion quite like *Oblivion*'s *Shivering Isles* since 2007. It was a full 20-hour quest set in the world of madness and mirth, and an experiment that became a huge success—exactly what DLC should be.

THE QUEST CONTINUES

But did Bethesda's ambitious approach pay off with the kind of cash a studio needs to keep being creative? It's notable that Bethesda's next game, *Fallout 3,* skipped the nickel-and-dime Horse Armor and New House DLC in favor of five brand new, story-driven experiences that ranged from an arcade-action trip into Canada to a redneck rampage in Maryland's swamps.

New Vegas was even more ambitious. Its six DLC packs added up to one story, told in episodic fashion. Episodic gaming never worked out for Valve but it did for Obsidian, and it let them tell a story that ran from B-movie madness through to a more subdued, philosophical finale. "The *New Vegas* DLCs were a unique opportunity to do short stories in the *Fallout* universe," explains *New Vegas* producer Chris Avellone, "and a rare opportunity to know, for certain, you're going to be able to do a series of adventures with a clear ending."

This is the kind of thinking that gives us DLC worth caring about. It's rule-breaking stuff that uses the game we bought as a launchpad for something so brave and so surprising we never knew we wanted it until we saw it downloadable for ten bucks.

Red Dead Redemption saw its fair share of costume and weapon packs, but it also gave us *Undead Nightmare*, which took the old west setting and flooded the world with zombies for an all-new campaign. It broke the usual DLC rules but also broke the rules of *sanity*. Nobody ever demanded a wild west zombie apocalypse sim, but once *Red Dead Redemption* was in players' hands, Rockstar was able to make a hugely self-indulgent game and release it as DLC.

PUSH THE BOUNDARIES

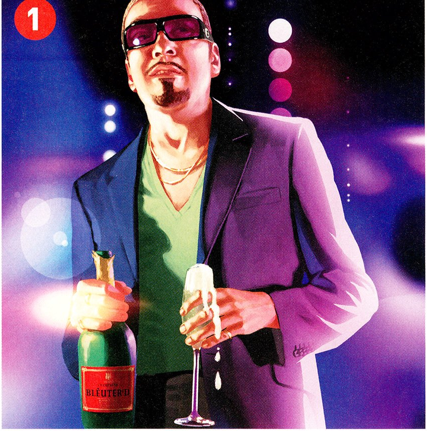
The best DLC pushes people out of their comfort zone a little. Face it, if *The Ballad Of Gay Tony* weren't riding on the back of the hugely successful *GTA IV*, few young male gamers would have gone to their local store to buy it. This did two things for *GTA* that *GTA IV* couldn't: first, it put 'gay' in the title and instantly shattered the minds of everyone who ever called someone gay as an insult; second, it broke every rule established by *GTA IV*.

GTA IV was serious and told a story filled with semi-credible action sequences that never stretched the reality of Niko's world too far. In *Gay Tony*, we're chasing men in golf carts and base-jumping from rooftops onto moving trucks. It's a step outside the reality Rockstar created for their biggest game and a return to classic *GTA* lunacy—and players loved it.

But not every developer has Rockstar's following. *BioShock 2*'s *Minerva's Den* is a great demonstration of what DLC can do while showcasing its potential pitfalls. *Minerva's Den* was set in a hitherto unseen bit of the underwater city of Rapture, with a new hero, new areas to explore, some new toys, and a brand new story: tracking down the control room for the world's first sentient computer. At least, that's the pitch. In practice, *Minerva's Den* turned out to be a more socially relevant story, revolving around just how equal a black man would be in the one city on 1950s Earth where all men were supposed to be treated the same.

Minerva's Den is a three-hour

> "This is the power of DLC—not simply to give us more game but to make our games something more."



5 MEMORABLE MOMENTS IN DLC

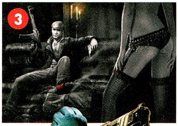
1. GTA IV: The Ballad of Gay Tony The DLC that gave Liberty City its craziness back. Less gritty and depressing, much more fun.

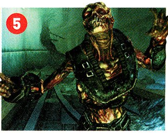
2. Call of Duty: Black Ops: Map Packs At $14.99 for each pack of four or five maps, *Black Ops* really set out to test how much fans would pay.

3. The Saboteur If you bought the game second-hand, you'd notice a few things missing in your strip club base. This launch-day DLC brought back the boobies.

4. Mass Effect 2: Lair of the Shadow Broker A solid chunk of game, and a chance to learn your crew's secrets via the broker's in-depth files.

5. Fallout 3: Broken Steel A great example of DLC fixing problems after release—in this case, retconning the original game's braindead ending.





campaign wrapped around a tight story that builds on the core game and challenges players to think differently about Rapture. It received unanimous praise from critics and got 2K Marin's designer Steve Gaynor a job on *BioShock Infinite* at Irrational.

Gaynor has talked candidly about *Minerva's Den*, and practically wrote the textbook definition of why DLC can be great. "DLC benefits from the stable base of a AAA game to build on top of, and the strong support framework of a full-size AAA studio to keep the production running smoothly while allowing a small sub-team to follow its own creativity, making a new experience within the possibility space of the main game's premise," he says.

But *Minerva* also showed how short most games' shelf-lives are and how easy it is to lose an audience just six months after release. When *Minerva's Den* hit PSN and Live Marketplace in August 2010, *BioShock 2* had been long-forgotten. It didn't help that the DLC up to that point had consisted of content for the unplayed multiplayer mode, with the only previous single-player content being a Horde-style survival mode expansion.

That's why DLC is all map packs and costume bundles—they're quick to turn around and devs can hit players before they forget all about a game. Many developers prefer to launch DLC in two specific time windows: 30 days and 90 days after a game hits retail shelves. It's no wonder most first-month content feels like it should have been part of the game in the first place.

QUALITY GUARANTEED

Great DLC needs our support as much as it needs backing from developers. Great DLC needs to be more visible on PlayStation's PSN, Xbox Live Marketplace, and even on PC's Steam store. Publishers will only back it and developers will only make it if platform-holders can promote it and gamers can extend their attention spans.

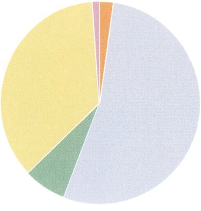
Mass Effect 2, Gears of War 3, and even *Battlefield 3* rewarded players who pre-ordered or bought their games brand new with vouchers entitling them to DLC further down the line. It's a promise from developers to support the game and a promise from players that they'll still be interested when that DLC appears. It's a subscription for more game. But developers are still playing it safe. If players have already made that investment, then why not blow our minds?

Every world has more than one story to tell, and more often than not, the main one isn't the most interesting due to having to appeal to everyone equally. DLC is that rarest of things: a chance for developers to take risks and implement some of the crazy ideas that never made it into the game.

Imagine visiting a small part of Rapture in its glory days, before it became an underwater tomb, or a Rapture Noir, where you play as a private detective splicer trying to solve a mystery among the still vaguely human population while fighting your own plasmid addiction. Imagine flooding Liberty City and telling a story of survival in the submerged streets, where you have to fight for food and shelter and where you have to take a boat through Times Square.

DLC VALUE STATS

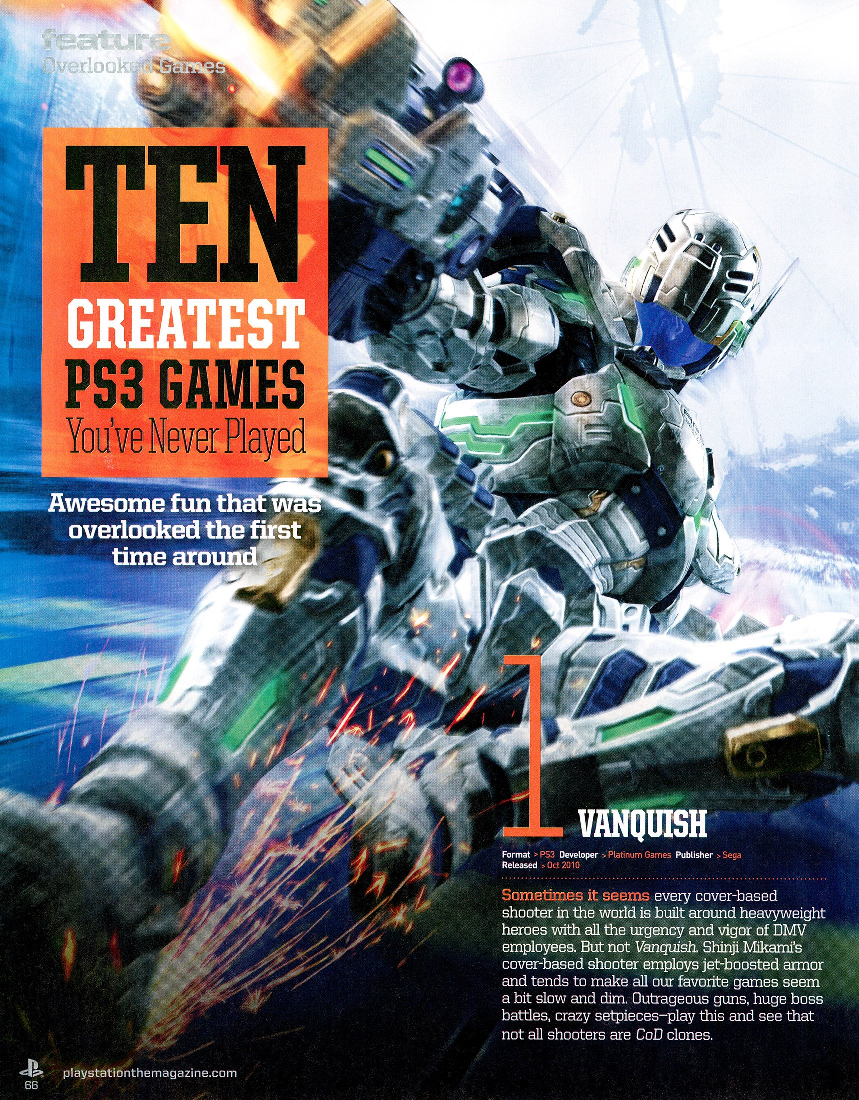
What kind of DLC gives you the most value for your money?



4%	"Deleted scenes" from the single-player campaign (*Assassin's Creed 2*)
55%	A whole new mini-campaign with new characters and settings (*Red Dead*)
7%	Multiplayer maps and modes (*Call of Duty, Battlefield*)
32%	New locations and objectives in the existing campaign (*Oblivion, Mass Effect 2*)
2%	Character skins (*Batman, Street Fighter IV*)

DLC could even instigate social change, at least among gamers. Imagine if an *Assassin's Creed* expansion offered a campaign starring a new assassin, where at some point it's casually revealed our character is gay. In a mainline sequel, it would be a controversial, even devastating move for stab-happy players, but as DLC for an already successful game? That's a much safer bet, and it would only take one company to show it could be done for it not to seem like such a big deal. Lest we forget, gamers were *stunned* when Samus Aran was revealed to be a woman at the end of the first *Metroid* back in 1986.

This is the power of DLC—not simply to give us more game but to make our games something more. Not everything has to rewrite the rulebook, and not everything has to change the world. Those that do, though, deserve our support. Buy them, embrace them, appreciate them, and we'll see many more like them in future. And if you have spare change? We're sure there'll still be many gimmick packs too. ■



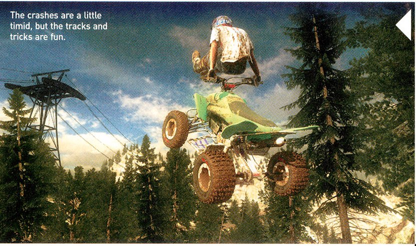
TEN GREATEST PS3 GAMES You've Never Played

Awesome fun that was overlooked the first time around

1 VANQUISH

Format > PS3 **Developer** > Platinum Games **Publisher** > Sega
Released > Oct 2010

Sometimes it seems every cover-based shooter in the world is built around heavyweight heroes with all the urgency and vigor of DMV employees. But not *Vanquish*. Shinji Mikami's cover-based shooter employs jet-boosted armor and tends to make all our favorite games seem a bit slow and dim. Outrageous guns, huge boss battles, crazy setpieces–play this and see that not all shooters are *CoD* clones.



The crashes are a little timid, but the tracks and tricks are fun.

2

PURE

Format > PS3 **Developer** > Black Rock Studio **Publisher** > Disney Interactive Studios **Released** > Sep 2008

The recession and Black Rock Studio's largely average racer *Split/Second* are likely the cuplrits of the dev's demise, but its quad bike racer *Pure* still stands tall. Sure it's shallow, but it's rocket-fast and beautiful in a clean, bright way. Plus the customization is fun and the tracks are pretty rad.

3

SHADOWS OF THE DAMNED

Format > PS3 **Developer** > Grasshopper Manufacture **Publisher** > EA **Released** > June 2011

Imagine if *Resident Evil 4* took place in hell and had a ton of dick jokes, nudity, and swearing—that's basically *Shadows of the Damned*. It's the product of Suda51, *RE*'s Shinji Mikami, and a couple of other noted creative geniuses. It promptly sold about three copies.

5

BAYONETTA

Format > PS3 **Developer** > Platinum Games **Publisher** > Sega **Released** > Jan 2010

The story is batsh-t insane and the leading lady looks 14 feet tall (and can use her hair as a weapon!), but *Bayonetta* is among the best games ever made. The combat's depth is daunting even for diehard action gamers, as *Bayonetta*'s combo system is so deep even the *creator* was surprised by what players discovered. Play it forever and you'll just scratch the surface.

4

Enoch's clothing of choice includes white armor and a pair of designer jeans.

EL SHADDAI

Format > PS3 **Developer** > Ignition Tokyo **Publisher** > UTV Ignition **Released** > Aug 2011

Heaven's toughest priest spends 200 years hunting seven fallen angels who are corrupting mankind's evolution, and *Shaddai*'s art team spends ten hours blowing your eyeballs out the back of your head. It's a simple action game that looks and feels like nothing else.

6

VALKYRIA CHRONICLES

Format > PS3 **Developer** > Sega **Publisher** > Sega
Released > Nov 2008

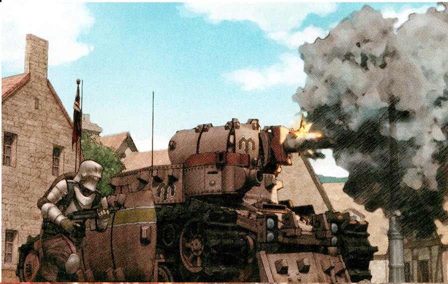
Sega's strategy RPG did well enough for two PSP sequels in Japan, but it didn't fare well here—players used to morbid grays and hateful heroes were alarmed by the bright colors, pretty characters, and intriguing story rife with charm. Definitely one of PS3's classics.

7

DARK SOULS

Format > PS3 **Developer** > From Software **Publisher** > Namco Bandai
Released > Oct 2011

If talk of *Dark Souls'* tremendous difficulty scared you away, you missed out on one of the most immersive RPGs ever made. *Dark Souls'* world is a bleak one, where every step into unknown territory is more terrifying than the last and where real gaming skill is met with real reward. And the boss battles? Downright frightening.



8

The "ultimate double punch attack" is ultra deadly. Also, we made that name up.

YAKUZA 4

Format > PS3 **Developer** > CS1 Team **Publisher** > Sega
Released > Mar 2011

***Shenmue* fans** yearn for a sequel—they have for 11 years—but if Sega actually got around to making one, it would probably be a lot like *Yakuza 4*. Producer Toshihiro Nagoshi may hate the comparison, but *Yakuza 4* contains the best elements of his open-world, story-driven crime sagas. Now, about that *Shenmue* sequel...

9

BULLETSTORM

Format > PS3 **Developer** > People Can Fly **Publisher** > EA
Released > Feb 2011

Anyone can kill their way to the end of this game; the trick is to kill with skill and exact gaming's most punishing (read: comedic) deaths on *Bulletstorm's* lumpen alien thugs. Yes, it's stupid, but the intent isn't—the goal is to have fun. EA hoped to sell millions thanks to its Epic/*Gears of War* ties, but only managed to shift a few hundred thousand copies. So there's a good chance you missed great guns, a beautiful world, and a meaty campaign. And lots of kills with a glowy whip thing.

10

CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW

Format > PS3 **Developer** > Mercury Steam
Publisher > Konami **Released** > Oct 2010

This sold more than naysayers expected, but that was still way less than it deserved. *Lords of Shadow* is a truly colossal adventure across a medieval world of dark gothic fantasy and a thoroughly decent excuse to batter the crust out of the undead with a chain. It may be a *God of War* clone, but hot damn is it good.

INNOVATION UNVEILED

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Produced By
IDG
WORLD EXPO

PlayStation
The Official Magazine

Reviews

Your essential guide to new releases

There's no denying that gamers are a nostalgic bunch. We tend to view the past exclusively through rose-tinted glasses, glamorizing those bygone franchises that, for one reason or another, we long to see reborn. And every so often we get our wish and a classic series is resurrected after thousands of forum posts and years of fond idealizing.

But as the old saying goes, be careful what you wish for. Inevitably, these franchise reboots must compete with years of expectation and our ardent commitment to the original games. Some newcomers can withstand that pressure...others can't. But it's important for all of us to remember that it's entirely possible for a reboot to be great in its own right, even if it's not the grand second-coming we imagined.

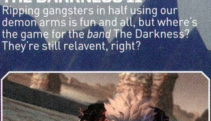
With that in mind, we present this month's reviews of *Twisted Metal* and *SSX*. Neither of them bothered with subtitles, but both bring new life to a beloved and long-running series. Are they able to survive the gauntlet of expectations? Can they stand on their own? Let's find out...

THE DARKNESS II

Ripping gangsters in half using our demon arms is fun and all, but where's the game for the *band* The Darkness? They're still relavent, right?

JOURNEY

Okay, what the hell, guys? This one's not about the band either?! Next you're going to tell us that *Blur* is a racing game not a mid-'90s rock band....WHAT??



ASURA'S WRATH

Are you sure this isn't a band name? It kind of sounds like a band name. Maybe we should *start* a band and call it Asura's Wrath. We could do punk covers of classic videogame themes!

How we score our reviews...

10 Awesome
Instant classic that's nearly PlayStation perfection.

9 Excellent
Highly recommended and a great investment.

8 Great
Wonderful yet possesses minor flaws.

7 Good
Enjoyable but with definite room for improvement.

6 Acceptable
A decent offering, but one that only satisfies in places.

5 Mediocre
A game that's both fun and frustrating in equal measure.

4 Flawed
Too flawed to be anything more than a curiosity.

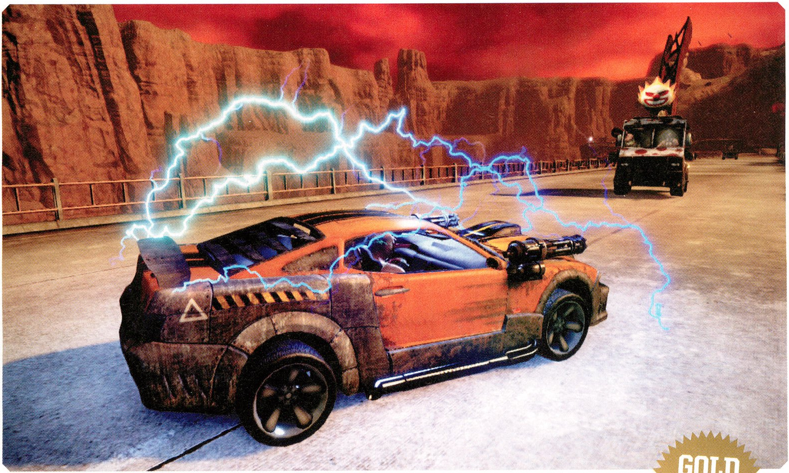
3 Poor
A seriously defective game with no long-term appeal.

2 Awful
A disgrace to the bargain bin. Avoid it like the plague.

1 Raw Sewage
Apparently, feces *can* be pressed on a disc.

GOLD AWARD
PlayStation

Our Highest Accolade
The gold award is presented to any game that we feel demonstrates significant innovation, near flawless gameplay, great graphics, and profound appeal.



GOLD AWARD
PlayStation
The Official Magazine

Twisted Metal

Insane at any speed

Ten seconds is about all it took for us to fully comprehend the *Twisted Metal* experience. By that mark, we'd accelerated to over a hundred miles per hour, snatched up a homing missile, fired it off at an enemy, blasted through a building that inconveniently stood in our path, and drove headlong into a town square populated by multiple rival road ragers. It's at this point that the psycho pack turned on us like piranhas in a feeding frenzy...or considering how we were ravaged, perhaps "piranhas in heat" would be more fitting.

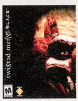
As PlayStation's longest running franchise, the *Twisted Metal* series has a reputation to uphold. Its gameplay has always been about raw, primal, vicious vehicular combat—a no-holds-barred, to-the-death competition between its bloodthirsty cast of psychopaths. While the iconic serial killing clown Sweet Tooth and his cronies are poor role models, their over-the-top personas add a suitable aura of madness to the chaotic gameplay. The cast is crazy, the high-speed adrenaline pumping action is crazy, and both elements are inextricably linked to the series' legacy. We wouldn't have it any other way.

Info

Format PS3 **Pub** SCEA
Dev Eat Sleep Play
Price $59.99 **ESRB** Mature
It's like a reunion with a seriously disturbed old friend.

Driver's Deaducation

Diving into *Twisted Metal's* single-player Story mode is the best way to get reacquainted with the franchise. Comprised of three storylines, the campaign features origin tales for Sweet Tooth, fatherless hoodlum biker Mr. Grimm, and ambitious model-gone-mad Dollface. All are competitors in the mysterious Calypso's annual *Twisted Metal* tournament, with the winner being awarded one wish for anything he desires. But as many discover, a deal with the devil never turns out the way one expects.



Want More?

Those who pre-ordered (and some early adopters) received *Twisted Metal: Limited Edition*, which includes a free download voucher for PS2's *Twisted Metal: Black*. Missed out? *Black* will be available for purchase on PSN soon.

The character's stories unfold via new live-action cinematics interspersed between stages of familiar *Metal* gameplay. The movies are well done and appropriately horrific and disturbing in content, but there's a jarring disconnect between the realistic cutscenes and the arcadey, almost cartoony nature of the gameplay. Hardcore fans may not blink an eye at these sequences, but newcomers should be aware that this is dark, disturbing stuff. It's here the game definitely earns its Mature ESRB rating. Maybe we're getting soft in our old age, but even as longtime *Metal* fans, its jarring to realize how unsavory and despicable our "favorite" ▸▸

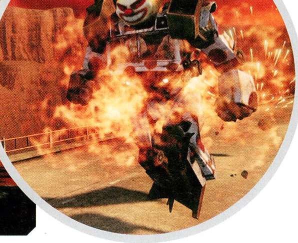
Every level has hidden secrets and locations. Discover them for new strategic wrinkles.

characters are. We welcomed diving back into the gameplay so as not to dwell so much on whether we should be idolizing serial killers and murders. On the plus side, there are some enticing plot revelations and tantalizing reveals at the game's end.

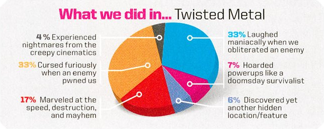
If there's a downside to the story mode's structure, though, it's that only three of the series' iconic characters get the starring-role treatment. Few games ever achieve the level of character identity and attachment that the *Metal* series has managed, so it feels like there's a content void when only a few cast members are spotlighted. The character imprints are also personified by the vehicles in the game, so it seems strange when, say, Sweet Tooth can select to pilot any available vehicle rather than his own iconic ice cream truck.

But technically, *Metal* lives up to next-gen expectations with incredibly fast and frenetic gameplay and visuals befitting its long-awaited PS3 debut. While the look doesn't achieve drop-dead gorgeous levels, the vehicles and environments are attractively lit and detailed. But the key here is the game's performance. There are moments when the screen view is consumed by a barrage of cars, weapons fire, and buildings disintegrating, yet there's never a hint of diminished frame rate. We've seen games with half as many onscreen elements stutter to a crawl. *Metal's* engine is definitely running on all cylinders.

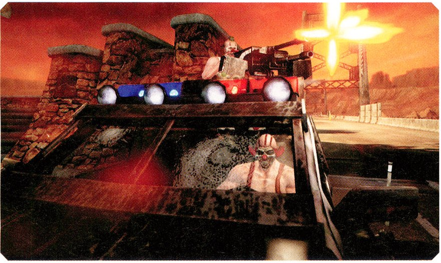
Vehicles have capabilities that can only be accessed with specific control inputs. Learn them.

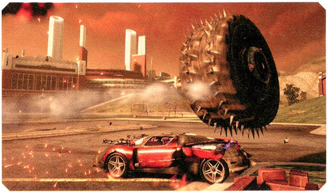


Physics be damned! *Twisted Metal* dispenses with any pretense of realism for its fast and furious brand of vehicular mayhem.



But regardless of the wrapping, it's *Metal's* gameplay that truly shines. The concept is simple: drive a heavily armed and armored vehicle, pick up weapon powerups, and smash rivals or die trying. Part of the appeal here is that the fun is instantly accessible, even to noobs. Anyone can dive in and enjoy the fracas by focusing on the basics of driving fast, shooting, and (occasionally) running away. But *Metal's* shining achievement is its spot-on gameplay balance and layer-upon-layer of strategic and tactical depth. The vehicles themselves have strengths and weaknesses based around speed, armor, and special weapons power.





Every advantage in the game can be negated.

Story mode should be considered mandatory drivers training. It's the best way to learn each vehicle's strengths and weaknesses.

The special weapons are unique to each ride and offer multiple levels of deployment ease and lethality. The standard powerups feature a variety of projectile attacks that range from weaker lock-on types to more damaging skill-based strikes. The map environments too feature a bevy of weighted advantages, with the more coveted powerups invariably located in harder to access or highly vulnerable locations. Seemingly every potential advantage in the game can be negated, every tactic countered, every strategy nullified—but only if we've racked up enough time behind the wheel to learn all the ins-and-outs.

Sound complicated? In a way it is, as *Metal* is one of those rare games that doesn't shy away from being difficult, challenging us to keep replaying levels until we learn to fuse knowledge, experience, and execution. We managed to conquer Story mode on the Normal difficulty in under 10 hours, but when we upped the difficulty to "Twisted" during our replay, we spent a good three hours stuck on the first level. Only hardcore players—and those willing to invest the time to master *Metal's* play intricacies—need apply.

Road Kill Thrills

Studio Eat Sleep Play has emphasized throughout *Metal's* development that its focus has been on the multiplayer experience, and it's during multiplayer—whether 16-player online, LAN, or up to four-player local splitscreen—that the game's depth and tactical variety is best exhibited. *Metal* challenges the *Call of Duty* twitch shooter experience that currently defines online multiplayer with an approach that fuses a fighting game's back-and-forth momentum swings with a flight sim's hunt-and-destroy nature.

Every multiplayer encounter—whether during deathmatch, survival, or team objective modes—requires an instant, on-the-fly analysis upon engagement: Which vehicle am I fighting? What are its strengths and weaknesses? Does the terrain in the immediate area offer a tactical advantage? Can we discern our enemy's attack tendencies? Are there essential weapon and health powerups in the vicinity? It's this essential thought process that makes a seemingly straightforward blastfest so much more compelling.

Central to these encounters is the thrill of the chase. While there are instances where a confluence of offensive fire can result in a quick death, most engagements are protracted duels with dogfight-like shifts in positioning and momentum with brief windows of opportunity to press the advantage. However these mano-a-mano battles ultimately culminate, it usually feels like skill and (maybe) a dash of good fortune determined the outcome rather than indiscriminate button spamming. It's also remarkably refreshing to go through an entire match with long uninterrupted stretches of gameplay and only one or two respawns.

The sum effect of all of *Metal's* play options, depth, and unrelenting challenge is a game brimming with replay value—a seemingly endangered species these days. The meticulously balanced game continually rewards players willing to explore and master the entire spectrum of its play possibilities. It's the type of game that has us repeatedly hitting the restart button for just "one more go." That's all the confirmation we need that this *Metal* is pure gold.

PlayStation The Official Magazine

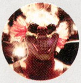
9

ROGER BURCHILL

Storied Cast

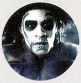
The single-player campaign focuses on three characters

I SCREAM MAN



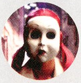
Sweet Tooth
Proof that the line between love and obsession is razor sharp.

SON OF ANARCHY

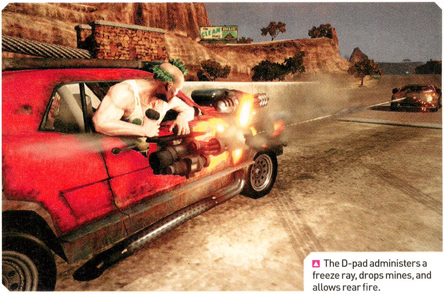


Mr. Grimm
Life's a lonely, bitter road when daddy isn't there anymore.

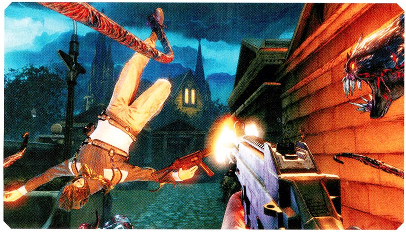
AMERICA'S CHOP MODEL

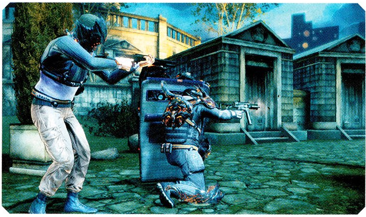


Dollface
Clawing your way to the top? Acceptable. Cleaving your way? Not.

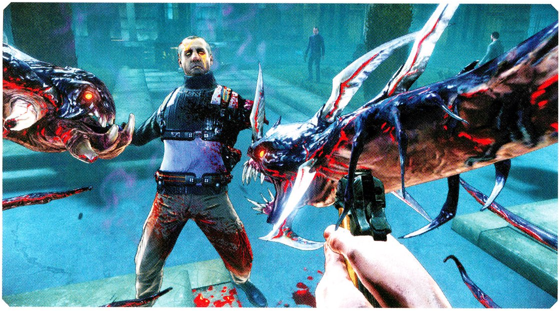


The D-pad administers a freeze ray, drops mines, and allows rear fire.





Agents of The Brotherhood are far more formidable than the goons in the original game. They know all of Jackie's weakspots.

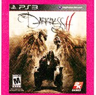


Whenever a creepy doctor prefaces an injection with "this will only hurt for a moment," bad news is sure to follow.

The Darkness II

A bright spot in the vast shooter darkness

Info



Format PS3
Pub 2K Games
Dev Digital Extremes
Price $59.99
ESRB Mature
It's like playing as the villian in a favorite monster movie.

A barrage of gunfire blows out the lights. There's a scream. Tentacles flail from the darkness and slash someone's head off; a car door is tossed through the air, slicing another person in two; the last man in the room is grabbed by a tentacle, which dangles him in the air and rips him in half like a wishbone. Then the tentacles eat the men's hearts. It's a slasher flick, except in this movie the monster is *The Darkness II's* main character, Jackie Estacado.

After keeping the Darkness—an ancient evil power passed down to him through generations—locked away for years, Jackie's forced to unleash the horrors inside to fight a new enemy. Whereas foes in the original *Darkness* were common criminals, *The Darkness II* pits Jackie against The Brotherhood, an organization that knows more about the Darkness than he does. They use their knowledge to make his life harder, carrying various light sources that weaken Jackie's demonic abilities. Luckily, the Darkness is improved as well, with new powers that make clearing out rooms full of enemies more fulfilling.

The sequel bests the original in just about every way while maintaining the same story-focus that helped the first game rise above the average shooter. The gunplay is stronger, combat is more enjoyable, and the number of powers Jackie gains makes for consistently varied encounters. The visual style is new as well, sporting a cartoony coat of paint that creates a vivid, bloody comic book look that's absolutely splendid.

There's also more to do thanks to the addition of Vendettas, a cooperative campaign that can be played with up to four players. Each player chooses a character with unique weapons and abilities and enters into a series of missions that run parallel to the events of the single-player campaign. The Vendettas aren't nearly as strong as the campaign missions—made more for replayability than storytelling—but the inclusion of a plot at all is admirable and helps the multiplayer stand out more than the first game's mediocre competitive modes.

Occasionally repetitious battles and an unfulfilling cliffhanger ending kept the game from attaining "classic" status, but that didn't stop *The Darkness II* from being a distinctive, somewhat whimsical shooter that will help us get through the first few months of the year with a dark, twisted smile on our face.

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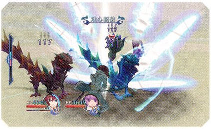
HOLLANDER COOPER

Tales of Graces f

A Tales we've been told many times before



A "style shift" mechanic lets fighters swap between two combo trees.

Info

Format PS3 **Pub** Namco Bandai
Dev Namco Tales Studio
Price $59.99 **ESRB** Teen
It's like a fine-tuned JRPG machine that's set on repeat.

Preparing for this review, we tried to count up all the *Tales* games released since the series went 3D. It's hard to settle on a number. Between spin-offs and ports on this or that console, we couldn't do much better than "a bunch of 'em." The important number, anyway, is eight—as in eight years since *Tales of Symphonia*. Eight years of new 3D *Tales* RPGs coming out of Namco's shop like clockwork. Eight years culminating in *Tales of Graces f*.

It's interesting to look at what's changed in that time and what hasn't. On the one hand, years of evolution and tuning have left the gameplay side of things a well-oiled machine. The realtime combat system is just the right mix of chaos and control. Each dungeon has a fun collection of quirky brain-teasers. Dozens of miniature skill trees make for lively, active character development. The graphics aren't as detailed as they could be (this is an upgraded Wii game port that's been given a facelift and some extra story content), but they work well given the cartoonish style of character design.

On the other hand, looking at the narrative side, time seems to have hardly passed at all. The cast is another pack of pastel-colored munchkins from anime central casting. The story was stitched together out of the usual clichés—it's easy to spot the bits recycled from *Tales* games past. As far as plot and character arcs are concerned, if you've played one *Tales* you've more or less played the lot.

What's under the hood of this series could power any kind of story in any setting. It doesn't always have to be *Tales of Light Young Adult Fantasy*. Why not *Tales of Cyberpunk* or *Tales of Kung Fu* or *Tales of Eldritch Horror*? That's what BioWare did, branching out from *Baldur's Gate* into sci-fi and other less traditional RPG settings, and it obviously worked wonders there.

Gamers who love their *Tales* exactly how they've always been will not see any of this as a problem, and they can look forward to a good time with *Graces*. As for everyone else, maybe the upcoming *Tales of Xillia* will break the mold. Somehow, though, we wouldn't bet on it. **DAVID F. SMITH**

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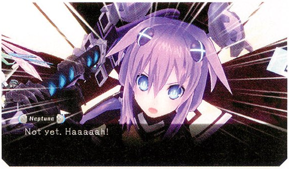

Neptune
Not yet. Haaaaah!

It's a shame we can't judge a game by its wardrobe.

Hyperdimension Neptunia mk2

Is this what you want?

Info

Format PS3
Pub NIS
Dev Compile Heart
Price $59.99
ESRB Mature
It's like a fetishist's dream game.

Assessing *Hyperdimension Neptunia mk2's* entertainment value is tricky because it isn't being sold as a game, so much. It's more like an object of fetish appeal, and mocking a fetish just means you aren't into it. Do you get off on cartoon 12-year-olds with giant saucer eyes and C-cup breasts? If the answer is no, you won't care about this game. If it's yes, you won't care how bad this game is.

But we are, after all, professional game critics, and so we must point out that this isn't a good game. It's better than the original *Neptunia*, which was barely even finished. It has a functioning combat system and something approaching a proper game's worth of world content. Still, the graphics engine is ages behind the curve, the battles and quests are a repetitive drag, and the script is an absolute wreck. For every good gag that occasionally comes along, there are a dozen that flop thanks to terrible editing or pointlessly dense in-jokiness.

So, once again, if you're into the cartoon 12-year-olds, adjust the score up a few points. Otherwise, avert your eyes and move along.

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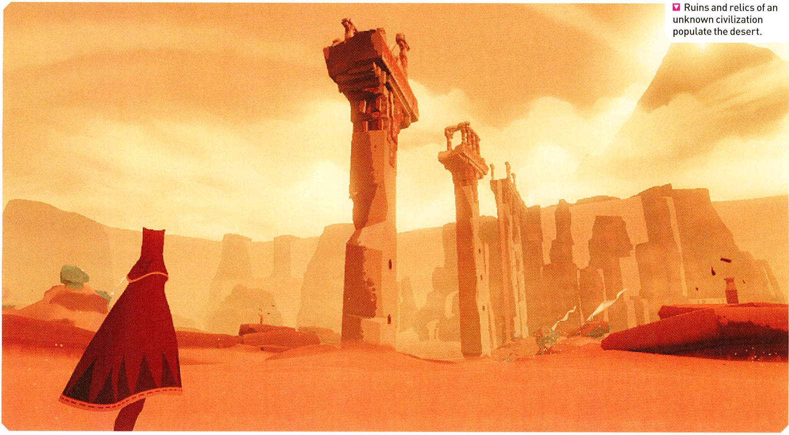
DAVID F. SMITH



Ruins and relics of an unknown civilization populate the desert.

Journey

A short hike or something more?

Info

Format PSN
Pub SCEA
Dev Thatgame-company, SCEA Santa Monica
Price $14.99
ESRB Everyone
It's like if *Uncharted* and *Flower* had a pacifist baby.

There are several ways one could interpret a game like *Journey*. It could be a metaphor for the journey from birth to death or from mediocrity to enlightenment. It could be a cautionary tale about environmental devastation and war, one of hope and redemption. Or it could just be about seeing a mountaintop from across a vast desert and wanting to climb on up there. In any case, *Journey* is a beautiful, thought-provoking trip through some of the prettiest scenery ever rendered on PS3, and for the short time it lasts, it's unlike anything else on the platform. Mostly.

Journey has a few things in common with developer thatgamecompany's previous game, *Flower*. It's very linear, with a similar emphasis on blending musical cues and pretty visuals to create an experience that's partly dependent on the player's continual forward momentum. It's also really, really short, clocking in at around two hours from desert to mountaintop—although to be fair, the things we did and saw in that time made it a pretty fantastic two hours.

For all that greatness, though, *Journey* is a deceptively simple game. The main character (or characters, if a second player wanders in) is a little brown-cloaked figure with no clear abilities except for a jump and a "shout." As we quickly learned, the shout is needed to revive, reactivate, and summon bits of scarf-like material, which are everywhere and either flap lazily in the breeze or float around autonomously. Touching these can also "refill" symbols on the main character's ever-lengthening scarf, which gave us the ability to not only jump but to float and fly over short distances as well.

Faraway Lands

These abilities are used to solve a series of simple puzzles, which mostly revolve around activating living

Five Stages On the way to enlightenment

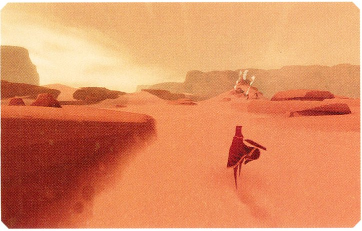
1 **The desert**
Vast, open plains dotted with dunes, ruins, and helpless scarves in need of rescue. What made it this way?

2 **The lost city**
A sprawling ruin that's nearly been reclaimed by the sands. Filled with more scarves and sand-slalom courses.

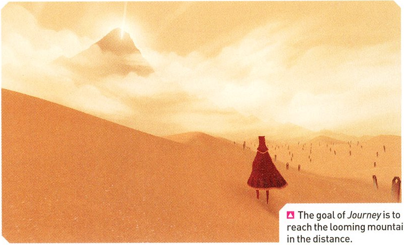
3 **The underground**
An ominous cavern that apparently filled with the relics of a long-forgotten war. It looks strangely like the ocean floor.

4 **The tower**
A soaring structure filled with jumping puzzles, water, and a huge, whale-like creature made of scarves.

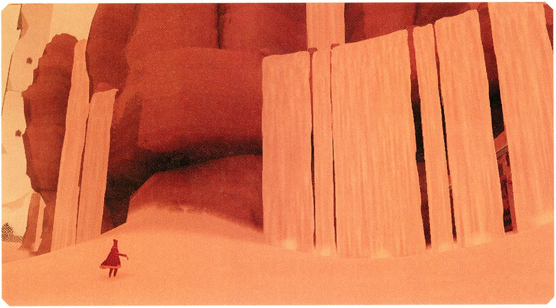
5 **The mountain**
Our ultimate destination and *Journey's* final testing ground. Here we face our lowest point—and also our highest.

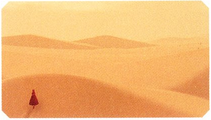


The sand literally moves in waves beneath our feet. We were absolutely stunned by how gorgeous the desert setting is.



The goal of *Journey* is to reach the looming mountain in the distance.





scarves to navigate the imposing dunes, crumbling buildings, and clanking machinery that make up the game world. For the most part, that world consists of the vast desert glimpsed in previews (which is a lot smaller and more confining than it looks), but that soon gives way to a ruined city filled with shimmering, sunset-lit sands, vast underground caves patrolled by strange biomechanical creatures, a huge tower filled with platforms and golden water, and finally, the snowy, treacherous slopes of the far-off mountain itself. Along the way, the story of these areas—and of the civilization that used to inhabit them—is revealed through wordless cutscenes and frequently ominous murals.

In some cases, the billowing, shimmering sand effects and crumbling beauty rival *Uncharted 3* for sheer prettiness (especially when we were slaloming downhill into the unknown). Some areas resemble the ocean floor, with the scarf-like creatures appearing similar to sea life. Others project an immediate sense of danger, something that's augmented hugely by the way the soundtrack is synced tightly to the action onscreen (approaching threats, for example, are accompanied by a deep, worried flurry of cello notes).

Kindred Spirits

Facing these threats on our own can feel daunting and lonely, but that's not really the way *Journey* is meant to be played. Connecting to PSN opens up the possibility of randomly stumbling across another player, which presents an opportunity to either adventure with them or to continue on and ignore them. Communication beyond shouts and jumps is impossible, although the PSN tags of players encountered during *Journey* are displayed after the credits.

The game has a distinctly different feel either way, as pairing up with someone enabled us to continually replenish our scarves by coming into contact with them or their "shouts," theoretically enabling us to float and fly indefinitely (and at some points sail right over certain obstacles). Pairing up also gives the game's final levels a unique feel. Instead of a lone survivor facing down terrible odds as the cold continually depletes our scarf-energy, it gives us a chance to huddle together for energy (and presumably warmth) with another intrepid soul.

In spite of all this, *Journey's* short length and limited replayability make it difficult to wholeheartedly recommend. It is, however, a tour de force of brilliant visuals and music, as well as a joy to play through and explore. It's absolutely worth experiencing at least once.

MIKEL REPARAZ

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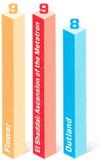
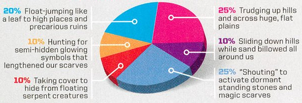
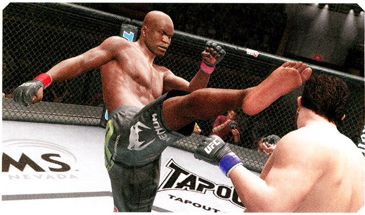


ScorePole

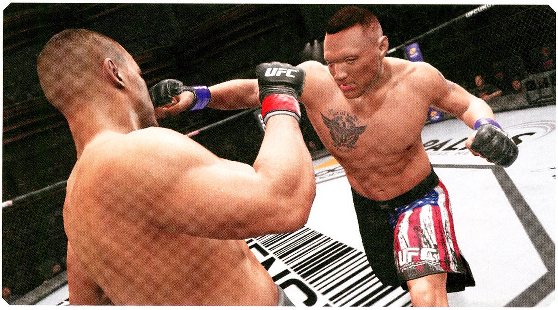
Journey is thatgamecompany's most ambitious game to date and ranks among their best.

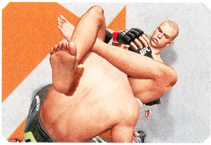
What we did in... Journey





A new replay tool lets us capture our favorite knockouts on video.

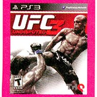




UFC Undisputed 3

Are you not entertained?!

Info



Format PS3
Pub THQ
Dev Yuke's
Price $59.99
ESRB Teen
It's like winning a fistfight and feeling like a gladitor.

There are no fireballs in *UFC Undisputed 3*. No one is going to do a Shadow Kick or a Kamehameha, and no fight will ever end with Royce Gracie tearing out the still-beating heart of Anderson Silva. It's not that kind of fighting game. THQ's take on the UFC license is a realistic one, reproducing the gladiator battles of the modern era with as much accuracy as possible. After a failed attempt to turn the license into a yearly franchise lost *UFC* some fans in 2010, the developer took some time off to make sure this third iteration was worth the wait and did a great job cleaning up the rough edges.

That same mix of absurdly strong fighting and deep, rewarding gameplay returns, but the pacing has been improved in a number of technical ways, meaning fewer flash knockouts, longer matches, and more maneuvers. But all other gameplay updates are minor when compared to what has been done with submissions. The system from *Undisputed 2010* involved spinning the Right-stick, which lacked technical skill and was, above all else, freaking annoying. It's now been replaced by a minigame of sorts where the two opponents must maneuver dots around the perimeter of an octagon that appears on the heads-up display. It's a bit jarring at first and feels removed from the rest of the gameplay, but the new system works and is nowhere near as encumbering as in previous games.

Career mode, however, feels like a step back from *Undisputed 2010's* due to a switch from a simulative career to an experience that attempts to immerse the player in the brand with fighter interviews and archival footage. It's still mechanically and technically better than the last game's career mode, but we really preferred feeling like we were working our way up the UFC's ranks instead of just fighting in a bunch of matches and being told by UFC fighters what it was like for them.

This setback, however, is balanced by another leap forward: the inclusion of the Pride Fighting Championships. Pride's inclusion is bigger than it sounds—it's not just a new arena, and it's not just a new rule set. It's essentially a new fighting game, with rules that change the pace of the matches entirely, new announcers, and a completely unique presentation. Fans will rejoice, and everyone else will just enjoy being able to play the same game with drastically different rules that allow brutal head kicks, vicious stomps, and other absolutely nasty moves.

Undisputed 3 provides a number of fantastic upgrades to the UFC formula, with stronger fighting and a whole lot more to do. Hopefully sequels will enhance the career mode, but for now we're more than happy with this head-stomping, high-kicking good time. **ERICK CEIL**

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Shank 2

More guts, less glory

Info
Format PSN
Pub Electronic Arts
Dev Klei Entertainment
Price $9.99 **ESRB** Mature
It's like a bloody okay time.

An early *Shank 2* cutscene shows the titular blade-bearing badass chainsawing the tail off an in-flight chopper shortly before tearing the toothy jaws from a shark's mouth. So, yeah, this side-scrolling beat-'em-up sequel isn't shying away from the over-the-top style that made its PSN predecessor a pulp fiction-flavored, gore-soaked success.

Like the original, it also delivers lightning-fast combat that allows us to seamlessly switch between melee and ranged attacks, and peppering foes from afar with bullets before finishing them off with blades is still a blast. Complementing the core combat are moves old (pouncing and grappling) and new (countering attacks and charging shots) that inject the basic brawling with additional strategy. More than that, though, they serve as a visually slick way to carve baddies from head to toe.

Sadly, *Shank 2* also empowers its enemies. Crazies are not only more numerous, they're tougher to take down as well. This results in many chaotic battles that, unfortunately, will see all but the most seasoned players forgoing the promise of nuanced combat in favor of frantic buttonmashing. While it's still a solid sequel, *Shank 2* may have benefited from a less-is-more approach. MATT CABRAL

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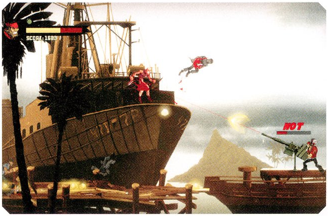
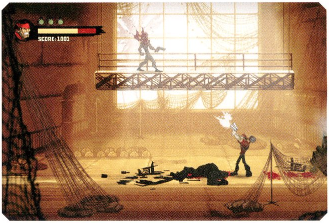
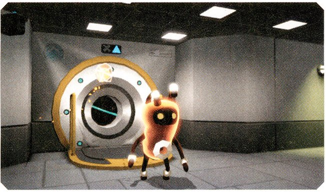
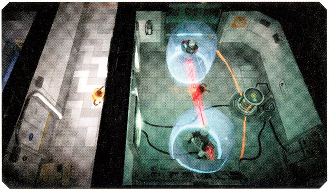


▲ In addition to new death-dealers, Shank can unleash a variety of environmental attacks—like runaway forklifts—on his foes.







◄ Zero's other scientist-tormenting tricks include the ability to swap places with items and people and launch objects after occupying them.

Warp

A puzzle game with guts, literally

Info
Format PSN
Pub Electronic Arts
Dev Trapdoor
Price $9.99
ESRB Mature
It's like that one part in *Alien*. You know the one.

Based on its sterile laboratory setting, twisted sense of humor, and titular science-defying trick, *Warp* is easy to dismiss as a poor man's *Portal*. Surface similarities aside, though, Trapdoor's stealth-action puzzler possesses a personality all its own.

As adorable alien Zero, we must escape an underwater lab populated by scientists with a penchant for prodding their otherworldly prisoners. Though seemingly harmless, the probe-phobic protagonist is actually an evil E.T. intent on exacting revenge.

His signature skill not only allows him to teleport short distances through solid objects but also lets him occupy enemies' bodies. Once inside, a few rotations of the Left-analog stick sends his host's innards exploding like road kill in a microwave. In addition to plastering the environments with pulpy viscera, the ability—also used to enter turrets and barrels—injects the sneak-heavy gameplay with a satisfying surprise.

The well-paced campaign also carefully doles out new powers—like conjuring an enemy-distracting clone—and even sports a currency-based character upgrade system. Optional challenge rooms aren't as engaging as the critical path, but their inclusion doesn't sully the sinister fun. MATT CABRAL

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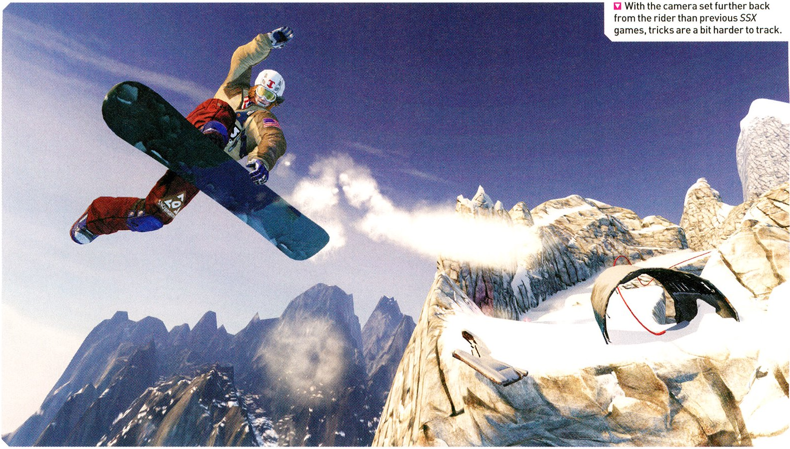


With the camera set further back from the rider than previous *SSX* games, tricks are a bit harder to track.

SSX

It's tricky to rock a reboot

This is not the *SSX* we remember. Wait, wait—don't throw the magazine down in disgust just yet! While the experience has certainly been refocused and in many ways toned down, it's not all bad. In fact, this next-gen *SSX* reboot gets most of it very right.

The basic gameplay, for example, retains all the elements that made the original games so addictively fun. The high-flying, reality-defying trick system still resembles an adrenaline-infused cross between snowboarding, skydiving, and insane aerial acrobatics, with plenty of Uber-tricks that remove the board from the rider's feet (and may or may not feature midair break dancing). And being rewarded with a visible shockwave when we stomp a landing still fills our tiny hearts with maximum joy.

Yet the trick system isn't perfect. At times, it actually feels a bit too easy to pull off the sort of insane tricks that once required precision timing. Gone is the risk/reward challenge of going for just one more rotation or one more grab. Instead, it's fairly difficult to blow a trick, and stunts like 1080s that should feel rewarding can be executed with almost no air (or effort). As a result, we often found old school *Tony Hawk*-style trick-spamming to be the most effective way to beat Trick It events, which, while still fun, is a bit disappointing.

Chillin' and Thrillin'

The game's weakest element, however, is the level design. With no halfpipes, no fireworks, and no neon signs, the world feels less like a Japanese game show and more like, well, a blasé

Info

Format PS3
Pub EA Sports
Dev EA Canada
Price $59.99
ESRB Everyone
It's like an ex-snowboarder: a little more serious and a bit rusty.

Five Facts About SSX multiplayer

1 **No Time** The game focuses on "asynchronous" competition—meaning personal high scores and best times matter most.

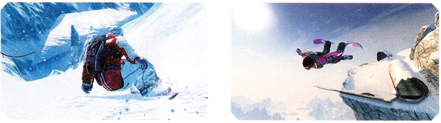
2 **All Alone** Explore mode allows players to fly solo, one run at a time, and post their best results to one ongoing global leaderboard.

3 **Score Poll** Global Events let players attack the same run all at once for a set period of time. Highest score or best time wins.

4 **Altogether Now** According to the devs, Global Events can host up to 100,000 players, though obviously they won't all appear on screen at once.

5 **The 1%** Global Events rank players by bracket. The top one-percent place in the Diamond bracket, the top five in Platinum, and so on.

▲ While the game looks just fine, the graphics aren't going to wow anyone.



▼ The campaign pits Team SSX against one rival rider. Doesn't really seem fair, does it?

mountain. Certain portions—especially the giant, grindable structures of Siberia—really captured the larger-than-life spirit of *SSX*, but by and large, the levels lacked character. And for some inexplicable reason, every course is littered with bottomless pits, many of which we couldn't even be seen until we were airborne.

To be fair, the game does introduce a rewind mechanic that allows us to roll the action back a few seconds. This definitely saved our butts a few times, though other riders continue at normal speed, making it less useful for race events. The game's other major introduction fairs a bit better: the infamous Deadly Descents. These equip players with tools like glide suits or ice picks and turn them loose on particularly trying terrain. The resulting challenge was usually a welcome change of pace. The avalanche section? Topnotch.

So yes, things are different. The campaign feels awkward and unfamiliar and the multiplayer doesn't allow for direct head-to-head competition (oh well), but the game still manages to fuel our competitive juices, compelling us to repeatedly say, "Just one more run!" as we bomb the same course for the millionth time. We are addicts, and the Uber-meter is still our drug…flaws and all. SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

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Naruto Shippuden Ultimate Ninja Storm Generations

Another year, another Naruto

Info

Format PS3
Pub Namco Bandai
Dev CyberConnect2
Price $59.99
ESRB Teen
It's like a lifetime of ninja sameness in one convenient package.

As the *Generations* in the title suggests, *Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm Generations* spans Naruto's life, beginning with a foolish, naïve boy and ending with a young man struggling to save his friend and rival Sasuke. The campaign initially provides three playable characters—young Naruto, older Naruto, and Sasuke—and allows us to unlock more as we complete the initial arcs. Unfortunately, the expanded universe and story options don't stop this from feeling like the same *Naruto* game we've seen so many times—though the game is not without its unique quirks.

Unlike other *Naruto* titles, there's no gameplay outside of the battles. Instead, narration carries players from Fight A to Fight B, eliminating any player involvement but also negating the shoddy platforming and boring backtracking of past titles. The fights themselves don't see such an upgrade. While the characters employ a variety of attacks to keep the on-screen action from appearing dull, their combos all require the same mindless buttonmashing, leaving our eyes interested but our fingers flailing. Without a strong fighting game foundation, even the relatively novel narrative approach can't redeem the experience. ANNE LEWIS

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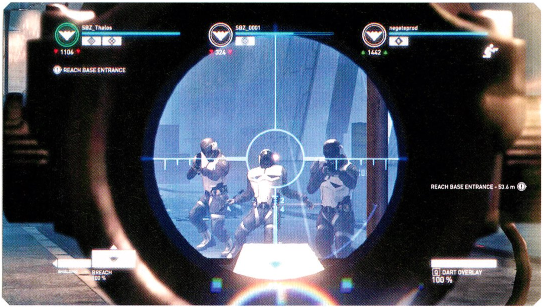

Cayman Global

▲ You'd think having an advanced cyberbrain would make handling weapons easier.

Syndicate

Sometimes the future isn't what it used to be

Co-op Stop

Instead of competitive multiplayer, *Syndicate* has a co-op mode that lets you and up to three friends play missions based on those in the campaign, which might've been fun if this mode didn't suffer from the same control issues, smoggy graphics, and accuracy-deprived enemies that undermine the single-player mode.

When EA announced plans to revive mid-'90s isometric, tactical cyberpunk shooter *Syndicate* as a first-person shooter, fans of the original were none too pleased. As it turns out, they won't be alone in their disappointment, as fans of contemporary sci-fi shooters will likely be just as displeased with this reworked reboot.

The biggest problem with *Syndicate* is that the controls are loose, wobbly, and inaccurate. They improved a bit when we tweaked the settings and employed the optional aim assist, but they still never felt quite right. It's not a deal breaker, per se, but in an age when first-person shooter controls have been done exceptionally well by the *Resistance* and *Call of Duty* games, it's kind of inexcusable.

The game also makes things too easy by providing a visual filter that, like Batman's Detective Vision in the *Arkham* games, let us see exactly where our enemies were located. This works fine for Bats since he still has to beat baddies up, but *Syndicate* let us pick them off from afar. And since the filter recharges rather quickly, we didn't have to use it sparingly.

It also didn't help that the Kusanagi ACR-10 Assault Rifle—which we got early on—fires bullets than can pass through light cover, effectively removing any challenge some enemies might've offered. Or that the story is forgettable when it's not being preposterous. Or that the bad guys are crappy shots. Or that the visuals are super murky.

PS3
SYNDICATE
EA

Info

Format PS3 **Pub** Electronic Arts **Dev** Starbreeze **Price** $59.99 **ESRB** Mature **It's like** *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* minus most of the good parts.

None of this would be so irritating if we could simply dismiss the game as universally terrible, but there are hints of a much better game here, something akin to what *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* might've been had that action-RPG been the shooter its commercials had promised. Take its hacking mechanic, for example. It let us not only disable grenades and turn auto-turrets against our enemies but also short out enemies' guns or force them to kill their coworkers and then themselves. We could even override someone's cyberbrain from a distance and make it explode, taking out both its owner and anyone nearby.

Because we couldn't just hack everyone or everything and the cyberbrain hacking attacks recharge slowly, it didn't make the game too easy. Even better, because the hacking is automatic and didn't require us to solve a puzzle, it wasn't as frustrating as the same mechanic in other games.

Syndicate also features some interesting (though not wholly original) weapons, including a the EMW-56 Gauss Gun that, like *Resistance's* Bullseye, can lock on a target and then send all its bullets there—even around cover. These can be improved through a simple upgrade system that let us augment specs like health, damage resistance, and ammo capacity.

Still, thanks to the flawed fundamentals, all the great mechanics in the world can't save *Syndicate*. While the new game clearly isn't for fans of the original, those hoping for a cool cyberpunk shootout will only be only slightly less disappointed. PAUL SEMEL

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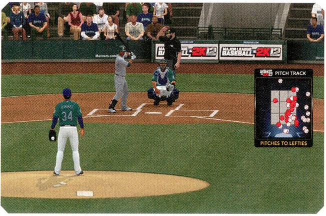
MLB 2K12

A perennial contender

Get practicing on the mound—2K Sport's $1 Million Perfect Game challenge is just on the horizon.



Info

Format PS3 **Pub** 2K Sports
Dev Visual Concepts
Price $59.99 **ESRB** Everyone
It's like a like a good team that can't quite take the champ.

Each year, it feels like *MLB 2K* needs just one more cycle to pull all its talent together into a cohesive whole that genuinely qualifies for baseball sim dominance, and each year, enough is missing to ensure catch-up is still a huge part of the plan for the next iteration. While *2K12* plays a solid game and displays improvements over the past version, it doesn't add enough to achieve its lofty aspirations.

Presentation has always been a hallmark of this series, and additional commentary lines definitely added context to every game we played—every reference felt fresh. But on the field, the action felt very similar to last year, though a new fielding mechanism clearly illustrates the difference between players with high stats versus crappy ones and rolls individual talent into the algorithm.

Though building a squad in the ongoing Dynasty mode provides options for how deeply we get involved in the minor league structure, most players will want to bring My Player to the Majors. Very much akin to *MLB: The Show's* Road to the Show, players need to perform at the lower levels to earn recognition up the chain. It's fun for those committed and also excellent practice for pitchers who still need to understand the analog controls required to hit spots with even vague accuracy. Of course, 2K Sport's annual $1 million Perfect Game challenge should inspire the practice commitment required to excel. ALEX JOHNSON

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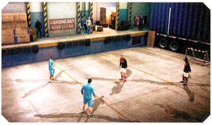

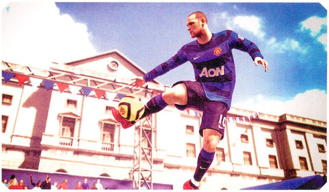

FIFA Street

Remember to look both ways before kicking off

Now powered by the *FIFA 12* engine, street soccer evolves on PS3 with an experience that's varied, fast-paced, and only qualifies as soccer in the broadest sense. *FIFA Street* highlights the tight control, fancy footwork, and trickeration that might elicit a good stomping on some of the harsher playing fields of world street soccer, but here rewards players with points, unlocks, and bragging rights.

Many of street soccer's various formats are represented here in several game modes such as Futsal, and the Custom mode option allows a wide variety of tweaks from one-on-ones to no goalies. This is handy to set up practice sessions to master controls that have the feel of a fighting game. Visually, every player has super-fancy, super-slick footwork. Unlike regulation FIFA, it's not so much about team tactics but individual dukes and dekes that leave defenders flat-footed.

Manipulating the analog sticks will take some serious practice, but once mastered, skinning the last defender, faking out the keeper, then heading the ball into the goal is wonderfully satisfying. Defending is something of a lost art in *FIFA Street*. It's possible to get a foot in on some players, but the highly skilled are almost unstoppable.

The quick-hit games and various play modes mean most players will have plenty of options to take on friends online, and each goal should just keep them coming back for more. ALEX JOHNSON

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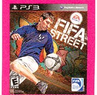
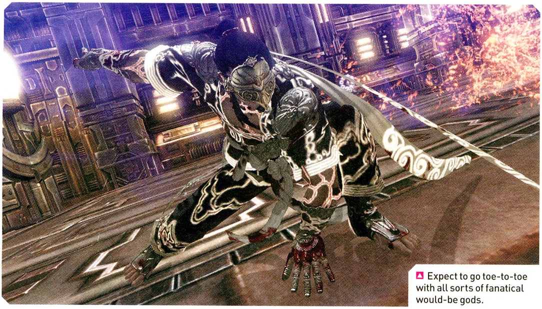
Info



Format PS3
Pub EA Sports
Dev EA Canada
Price $59.99
ESRB Everyone
It's like a local pick-up game—totally dressed down, but tons and tons of fun.



Expect to go toe-to-toe with all sorts of fanatical would-be gods.

Asura's heavy attacks are tied to a cool-down meter, so spamming the move isn't effective.

Asura's Wrath

You won't like him when he's angry...

Info

Format PS3
Pub Capcom
Dev CyberConnect2
Price $59.99
ESRB Teen
It's like a bizarre and thrilling Japanese panic attack.

As the title of Capcom's latest action-adventure suggests, main character Asura's a pretty angry guy. Fueled by betrayal, he makes Kratos' rage look like a toddler's temper tantrum. Asura's unbridled fury, however, takes a back seat to the game's beyond-bizarre presentation. A blend of Asian mythology and science fiction—with some Godzilla and kung-fu film inspiration tossed in for good measure—*Asura's Wrath* is an endlessly odd mix that, somehow, mostly works.

As the pissed-off protagonist, we're tasked with taking down his former allies, a smug group of self-proclaimed deities who are exploiting an ancient power possessed by Asura's daughter. Yeah, managing his anger is the least of Asura's worries.

While some early previews suggested *Asura's Wrath* might be a cheap *God of War*-wannabe, its actually an odd mix of quick-time events, on-rails shooting, and straight-up action driven by light and heavy attacks as well as jumping and evasive maneuvers. Gameplay is varied if a little clunky, as the flow of battle is an acquired taste. Lightning-quick pacing isn't this game's strong suit, either. The story is brimming with lengthy cutscenes and text-driven art stills.

While this approach will alienate those with anxious thumbs, the various narrative vehicles are refreshingly coherent, favoring meaningful context over the crazy-ass musings Japanese game characters are often prone to spewing. In fact, this very cliché is addressed with a wink by the developers when Asura encounters a boss who'd rather run his mouth than get on with the fight. When such chatty adversaries begin spinning their exposition-heavy yarns, we can put a satisfying stop to their yammering by triggering a "shut up" action with a simple button press.

Asura's Wrath is filled with fun quirks and eccentricities that—we think—are intentionally parodying the games that spawned it, but it's the excessively over-the-top boss battles that truly seem to be poking fun at its pretentious predecessors. A planet-sized boss (deemed the weakest of the lot by his allies) is a perfect example. By the time you're sipping tea—served by buxom, blindfolded women whose ample assets are actually accompanied by a "boing" audio cue—and enjoying a pre-fight hot spring bath with Asura's next nemesis, you'll either love or loathe *Asura's Wrath*. It's no doubt a niche offering, and its combat isn't nearly as polished as other third-person actioners. That said, it possesses an undeniable charm that its intended audience will embrace. Who exactly that audience is...well, we're still trying to figure that out. MATT CABRAL

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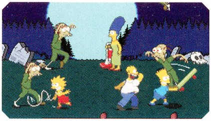
The Simpsons Arcade

Format **PSN** Pub **Konami** Dev **Backbone Entertainment/Konami** Price **$9.99** ESRB **Everyone 10+**

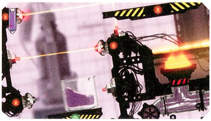


It's hard not to be charmed by *The Simpsons Arcade's* oozing early '90s nostalgia. But even with the retro-flavored glee that comes from bashing Springfield's miscreants as the loveable cartoon family, this port of the classic arcade co-op brawler suffers from repetitive combat and a short duration. Each character's unique attack style boils down to the same rote sequence of melee jabs, and there's little variation in the gameplay across the eight stages. Still, battling through creatively designed levels kept us glued to the screen. While it's far from an essential download, this beat-'em-up offers old-school fun to the hands of *Simpsons* fans. NATHAN MEUNIER

PlayStation **7**

Puddle

Format **PSN** Pub **Konami** Dev **Neko Entertainment** Price **$9.99** ESRB **Teen**

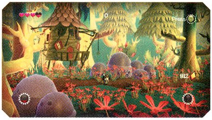


"Check out that sweet liquid!" is not a phrase we frequently say, but *Puddle's* highly realistic physics and innovative level design are things to behold. The premise is simple: Manipulate the screen using a DualShock's triggers or optionally tilting a Move controller to guide liquid from one end of the puzzle to the other while avoiding obstacles. The first level was deceptively easy, but everything after was increasingly punishing. Clear directions or hints weren't always provided, creating a trial-and-error style of gameplay that forced us to replay levels over and over. This lack of mercy had us cursing the game, but it also made every completed puzzle a truly satisfying victory. ANNE LEWIS

PlayStation **7**

Scarygirl

Format **PSN** Pub **Square Enix** Dev **TikGames** Price **$9.99** ESRB **Everyone 10+**



Despite its neat Tokidoki macabre style (inspired by the graphic novel of the same name), *Scarygirl's* platformer gameplay is never able to match the quality of its aesthetic. At times, it felt phoned-in, unoriginal, and fairly buggy, though the visuals and multi-path levels shine. The paper-thin story did nothing to compel us through each stage. While the platforming and combo-based combat were (mostly) mechanically solid, our only motivation to continue was to see more art. Youngsters might enjoy it for the style, but there's not much here for most gamers beyond what they could find in the free *Scarygirl* flash game. ANDREW GROEN

PlayStation **6**

DLC Roundup

Assassin's Creed: Revelations
Mediterranean Traveler Map Pack

Price **$9.99** ESRB **Mature**

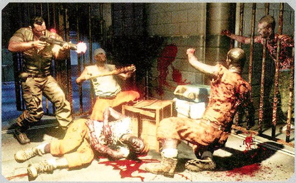
This scenic pack delivers a total of six vistas for exploring and stabbing opponents alike, including three all-new multiplayer maps (Jerusalem, The Imperial District of Constantinople, and Dyers) as well as three *Brotherhood* favorites.

Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception
Flashback Map Pack #1

Price **$9.99** ESRB **Teen**

Take a trip through memory lane with this set of classic maps from Drake's past exploits in the original *Uncharted* and *Uncharted 2*, including Sanctuary, Fort, Cave, and Lost City. Updated lighting and cool weather effects bring these oldies up to speed.

Download of the Month



Dead Island Ryder White

Price $9.99 **ESRB** Mature

The zombie-killing action heats up in this solo-only expansion that puts us in the skin of the villainous Ryder White. See what made White come unhinged prior to becoming the antagonist in the core game's main campaign. With a greater emphasis on story, gun-centric blasting over melee combat, and RPG-like character expansion, this DLC offers a compelling reason to book another vacation on Banoi.

The Adventures of Tintin

Not the same ol' Spiel

The Adventures of Tintin marks a welcome return to classic form for Spielberg. Bearing more than a passing resemblance to grand old cinematic adventures like *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, Tintin is terrifically fun, expertly crafted, and visually gorgeous. Tintin's transition from the venerable comic strip to computer-generated 3D extravaganza is the polished work of a master craftsman... or, in reality, a whole lot of them.

Though he wasn't given top billing, Peter Jackson had a strong hand in bringing the movie to life. The extras show that Jackson was instrumental at nearly every level of the film's development, and his in-house effects studio effectively created the film. Still, this is classic Spielberg through and through. Beyond all the shiny computer effects, frequently hyper-realistic visuals, amazing character designs, and animation, *Tintin* is a true cliffhanger-style adventure at heart.

Tintin works for viewers young and old because it mixes untraditional elements into what otherwise might be considered just a kid's movie. Though there's no over-the-top violence, the action level is very nearly constant once the movie gets going. One of the main characters is a severe alcoholic, the bad guys are surprisingly fleshed out, and even Tintin's dog, Snowy, is fun to watch.

Fun is the key factor here. *The Adventures of Tintin* is a great thrill ride with some truly inspired sequences, such as a thrilling battle between two shipping dock cranes that manages to evoke the imagery of a giant monster movie. The exotic locations, clever script, and very European feel of the film all keep the viewer's rapt interest.

Tintin, played by Jaime Bell, is the heart of the movie and proves to be a remarkably interesting hero. His boyish charm and goofy hair mix with a worldly sensibility and wide skill set. Unlike most similar characters, he's not naively getting by on luck and trust. He uses stealth and subterfuge, can hold his own in a fight, and is refreshingly intelligent. Oddly, so is his dog.

Paramount has included a wide array of behind-the-scenes videos that cover all aspects of the film's origins and creation. The footage on the motion-capture process is especially fascinating, though all the featurettes are worth a look. There's no commentary unfortunately, but this is an overall excellent package and a terrific film. **JASON D'APRILE**

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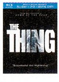
Info

Price $54.99
Creators Steven Spielberg, Steven Moffat, Edgar Wright, Joe Cornish, Peter Jackson, Hergé
Starring Jamie Bell, Andy Serkis, Daniel Craig, Nick Frost, Simon Pegg
Rated PG
Extras A variety of background and making-of shorts.

The Thing

Classic terror returns



Info

Price $34.98 **Creators** Matthijs Van Heijningen, Eric Heisserer, Eric Newman **Starring** Mary Elizabeth Winstead, Joel Edgerton, Ulrich Thomsen **Rated** R **Extras** Director/producer commentary; more.

It was a bold move for Universal to green light a prequel to a movie from 1982, but horror fans everywhere should be glad they did. *The Thing* works on nearly every level. For those who have never even heard of the original John Carpenter classic, this movie is perfectly effective by itself. For fans, however, it reaches a deeper level. In their commentary, the director and producer go into detail about just how tightly they were able to link this modern version to the original, and they did a terrific job.

Nearly every question about what went on in the Norwegian Antarctic camp before Kurt Russell and his team found the remains is answered, and this movie ends right where the first movie began. Beyond mere continuity, *The Thing* is just a great sci-fi monster flick. The premise of paranoia mixed with a truly horrific and gore-laden alien parasite works as well today as it did in 1982, and the Antarctic landscape is a perfect backdrop for the deep sense of alienation the movie provokes.

The largely Norwegian cast is superb, and Mary Elizabeth Winstead (who did a great job as Ramona Flowers in *Scott Pilgrim*) makes a surprisingly solid choice of lead. She's cute and demure, but still manages to hold her own amidst an all-male crew and a creepy space monster. The sci-fi elements of *The Thing* are especially appealing. Finally seeing the spacecraft hinted at in Carpenter's film is a real treat for fans, and the movie stays firmly in its R-rating when it comes to violence, gore, and mayhem.

Where every effect in the original was—by necessity—practical, the new *Thing* relies heavily on CG effects, and that's sort of a shame. At times (especially during the climax battle), the creature just looks too much like an effect. The final sequence with Winstead is also a bit iffy, but beyond that, there's little to complain about. *The Thing* is an impressively effective and thrilling monster movie and a welcome return to the cold, dark world that Carpenter created 30 years ago. JD

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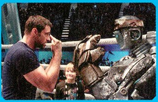
Blu-ray Roundup

Nude Nuns with Big Guns

Price $29.97 **Rated** Unrated

The name says it all in this surprisingly good exploitation flick. The lead nun takes her vengeful work seriously, the villains are vile and fun without being overtly cartoonish, and the movie delivers more gratuitous sex, nudity, and violence than almost any release we've seen in years. Curious? Go ahead and watch—we won't judge. 7



Real Steel

Price $39.99 **Rated** PG-13

A not-so-touching tale of an awful deadbeat dad who finds common ground with his estranged son through mechanized violence. The appeal here is the great robot fight sequences (despite plenty of technical inconsistencies) since the "human" story is amazingly trite. 6

Godzilla: Criterion Collection

Price $39.95 **Rated** Not Rated

Godzilla isn't just a movie—it's a true cultural relic. The scholarly commentary is fascinating and amusingly pretentious, yet worth listening to because it's hard for modern viewers to fathom the impact of this 60-year-old monster movie. Don't miss out. 8

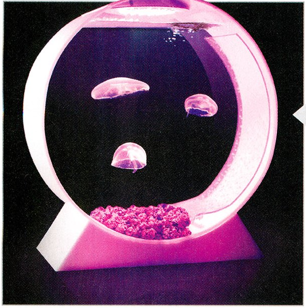
Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol

Price $44.99 **Rated** PG-13

Tom Cruise seems desperate to prove he's *the* action hero. Unfortunately, crazy stunts and a brooding Cruise seem to be the sole focus of this incredibly cold, by-the-numbers affair. 6

Want that

Lust-have stuff for PlayStation people



Desktop Jellyfish Tank

Developed specifically for jellyfish (which can't survive in standard tanks), this habitat features an air diffuser, built-in biological, chemical, and mechanical filtration, and a voucher for three jellyfish.

$350

jellyfishart.com

The Webble

We all sit far too much, and it's not helping our health (or posture). Enter the Webble: This footrest-on-wheels has won various design awards for letting us skate ourselves silly while we bang out emails or sit glued to YouTube.

$150

thewebble.com

ZVOX Z-Base 420

Surround sound setups are ideal on paper, but sometimes a living room is too small (or too chaotic) to accommodate that much gear. The Z-Base 420 soundbar combines all of your sound hardware into one 28-inch unit that fits snugly underneath the TV.

$300

zvoxaudio.com

Brondell Swash 1000

Ah, electronic toilets. The Swash 1000 will spray clean your nether regions and then air them dry, rendering toilet paper obsolete. It also sports a heated seat, a self-sterilizing stream, and an automatic deodorizer.

$599

brondell.com

Mohzy Petal Solar Light

If it's light you're after, it's light you'll get with this straight-outta-Mario Bros. sun-powered gizmo. The built-in solar panel recharges daily in direct sunlight and is activated automatically at dusk to help light the way.

Price: TBD

mohzy.com

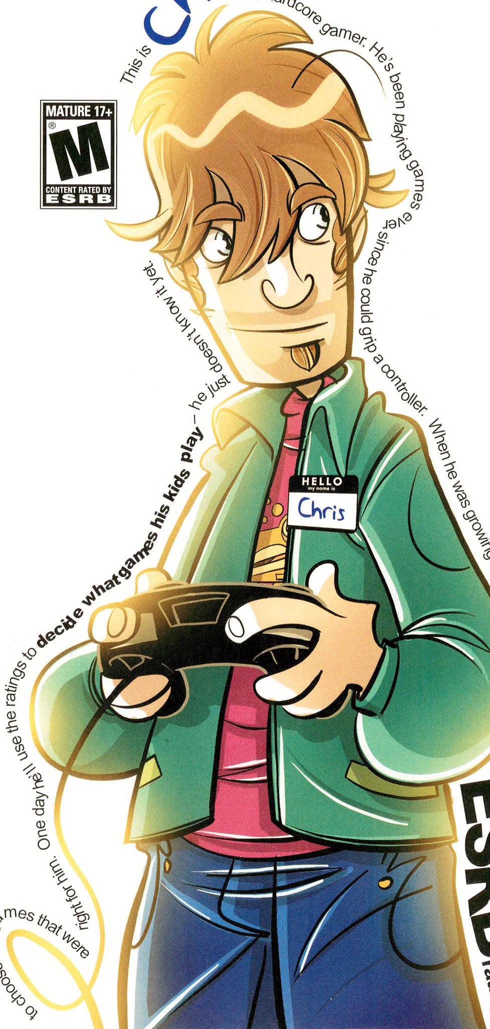
Solid Gray Backpack

If Stormtroopers carried laptops, they'd surely tote them around in Solid Gray backpacks. These lightweight, hardshell bags protect the most fragile of valuables, while various pockets inside are perfect for storage.

$150

solid-gray.com

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB



This is **Chris**, hardcore gamer. He's been playing games ever since he could grip a controller. When he was growing up, **his parents used the ESRB ratings** to choose the games that were right for him. One day he'll use the ratings to **decide what games his kids play** – he just doesn't know it yet.

mail@ptom

PS3 | PSP | PS VITA
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Issue 055 February 2012
REVIEWED
Final Fantasy
Fate/Extra
Oddworld
2011 GAME OF THE YEAR AWARDS
HIGHWAY TO HELL
TWISTED METAL!
Hideo Kojima on Metal Gear's past, present, and future
Strategies, vehicles, maps revealed!
SILENT HILL

And to think, all this just to deliver a pizza.

What do zombie poop, soggy mags, and space ships have in common? The PTOM Mail section!

Email us at PTOM_letters@futureus.com or write to PTOM, c/o Future US, 4000 Shoreline Ct. Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

Shut It Down

I was at Wal-Mart doing some shopping, and I was over in the game area when a woman was with a worker getting some games. She asked for *Battlefield 3*, but they were out so he recommended *Modern Warfare 3*. She said it was for a 10-year-old boy. I decided to step in and tell her the game was rated "Mature," and he wouldn't even be allowed to buy the game. She had no idea what the rating system was, so after me and the worker explained it, she refused to buy the games for her kid. She walked out with *Marvel vs. Capcom* instead and thanked us for telling her what the system meant. I think more adults should react like that when a 10-year-old asks for an M-rated game.

COREY THE INTERNET

Dude, that kid is going to be soooo mad at you. Seriously though, you did the right thing. While parents have the right to let their kids play whatever they like, it can't hurt to make sure the adults are making informed decisions.

Soggy Story

Dear PTOM, my magazines are always wet. Why?

VICTOR THE INTERNET

Uh, well... What are you doing to them?

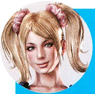
Honor Guard

What's happened to *Call of Duty*? Remember the old days when it was about brotherhood, loss, triumph, and the horror of war? I sure do, even though I've grown up in an age where games like *Black Ops* and *Modern Warfare* are all about killing the terrorist, looking totally badass in slow-mo, and using sneaky stealth tactics to take out a few guys. That's not what *Call of Duty* means. It means rising above the call of courage and honor, going above and beyond what your superiors ask of you when they hand you a gun and say, "Go out there and don't die." Sure, put in a few dramatic elements to keep the public interested, but can't we have a military shooter that's not all flashy? I personally believe COD should visit the war on terror and show us the truth of war.

TOM THE INTERNET

Rise and Fall

I'd like to know more about Hideo Kojima's decision to transfer responsibilities of the new *Metal Gear* to someone else. As soon as I read that, I just totally deflated and all interest in



Blonde on Blonde

Is it just me or does Juliet Starling from *Lollipop Chainsaw* look a lot like Kaley Cuoco from *The Big Bang Theory*?

JAMES THE INTERNET

Eh, we're not really seeing the resemblance, James. True, they're both petite, blond, and covered in pink, but one's stuck in the midst of a ravenous horde and the other is Juliet Starling

We welcome reader photos, letters, and stories ("Submissions"), however, we cannot promise to publish any Submission and none will be returned. Neither PlayStation: The Official Magazine ("PTOM") nor Future US, Inc. shall be liable for loss or damage to any Submission. By sending in your Submissions to PTOM you represent and warrant that you own or otherwise have all necessary rights to the Submissions to allow us to publish them in PTOM and as follows. You grant PTOM a worldwide, royalty-free, perpetual, irrevocable, non-exclusive right and fully sub-licensable license to use, copy, distribute, publish, modify, adapt, translate, and store, your Submissions, in any form, format, or medium, of any kind now known or later developed and to use your name, likeness, and any other information in connection with the use of the Submission you provide.

Metal Gear Rising just went away in a big poof of dashed hopes and dreams. I feel really let down. All that said, I have a lot of faith in Hideo and he's never let me down once, so I'll hold to that faith while September rolls closer. Also...where can I find a life-size statue of Naked Snake like the one featured in *Grandma's Boy*? I am literally a thousandaire, and I'm more than willing to part with a huge portion of my easily earned doll hairs.

SETH THE INTERNET

From what we understand, Kojima simply wasn't happy with how the project was coming together, so rather than kill it completely, he decided to hand it over to the very capable PlatinumGames. Seriously, have you played Vanquish *or* Bayonetta*? These guys know action games, and you should totally still be excited about* Rising*. Also, you're not talking about* this *Naked Snake, are you?*

I Am Unimpressed

After seeing trailers for both *I Am Alive* and *The Last of Us*, I'm more intrigued by *I Am Alive*. *The Last of Us* looks good, but seems to be tinged with that zombie/apocalypse/survival vibe. Just a bit clichéd. Speaking of the undead, if zombies eat, do they poop as well?

JOE CONNOR PENNSVILLE, NJ

Don't count The Last of Us *out just yet, Joe. This is Naughty Dog we're talking about here. If anyone can craft a unique, compelling experience in spite of apparent clichés, it's the team that gave us* Uncharted.

Genre Confusion

Since when did *Uncharted* not fall into the category of Adventure? *Uncharted 3* won the best Action game of the year, while *Batman* took best Action Adventure. When did those two become separate categories? I understand that it wouldn't make sense to not give the Game of the Year an overall winner or to have *Uncharted* not win anything, but having two near identical categories doesn't add up. What's the thinking behind that?

ALEX THE INTERNET

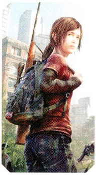
We'll admit there's a very fine line between Action and Action-Adventure, but here's our thinking on the subject: If a game features a continuous, linear sequence of missions with no breaks or real freedom, it's an Action game because that's all there is—action. If a game allows players to roam freely and explore between missions, that counts as Adventure. Now apply that to Arkham City *and* Uncharted 3 *and you'll see why we categorized them as we did. But hey, genres are very flexible. If you disagree, email us and tell us why.*

Lost in Space

Some of us "mature" gamers (mature as in we're older and have more money—don't know if we're actually mature or not!) are looking for spaceship games. There are lots of space-themed games, but I am referring to games such as *Blast Radius* for PSone. This game was awesome! You had different missions to either protect the mothership or raid and destroy, and the best part was we connected two PSones and played head-to-head matches or co-op modes. Now I do realize that online modes will replace this datalink usage, but my quest remains to find decent spaceship games! Do you know of any, either out now or in the works?

THE HAMSTER THE INTERNET

It's not just "mature" gamers, Hamster. Frankly, we here at PTOM believe everyone could go for some good ol' fashioned space combat, which is why we're pretty stoked about Starhawk*. Be sure to track down a copy of our March issue for the full story!*



Ask Scott

Q Do companies that make games like *inFamous* that are console exclusives receive more money? Or why do they get exclusive?

ANONYMOUS THE INTERNET

A Platform exclusive games are usually published (and bankrolled) by a console-owning company like Sony or Microsoft. Oftentimes those companies even own the development studios outright. Basically, modern triple-A titles cost a boatload to produce, so developers stand a much better chance of seeing their projects through to completion if they partner with a major player like Sony.

Et Cetera

All the other stuff that distracts PTOM

2013 Ford Fusion Hybrid

"Okay, maybe I am finally turning into a tree-hugging old dude. But the 2013 Ford Fusion Hybrid is one nice lookin' car. 47 mpg city/44 mpg highway? Works for me."

ROGER BURCHILL

SUMMER VACATION

Condition

"There might be more than one band called Summer Vacation out there, but this one's by far my favorite. Their most recent full-length features intentionally garage-y production that perfectly complements every energetic track."

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

Sushi

"Born and raised in the Midwest, I never really liked sushi. After moving out to the West Coast, I realized that was because I'd never had *fresh* sushi. My favorites? California, Philly, and Unagi rolls—I love 'em all."

RYAN TALJONICK

Men's Health
A MAN
A CAN
A PLAN
50 GREAT GUY MEALS EVEN YOU CAN MAKE!
BY DAVID JOACHIM

A Man, a Can, a Plan

"I am a TERRIBLE cook, but even I can follow the recipes in *A Man, a Can, a Plan*. The easy-to-follow directions make this the perfect cookbook for everyone, not just men."

ANNE LEWIS

PSN Best Games

It's the best of the best! Get the lowdown on this month's PSN goodies no one should live without.

BEST FULL GAMES

1

Creepy Crawly Platformer

Limbo

Limbo may have taken its time coming to PSN, but it was worth the wait. The game melds simple controls with supremely challenging gameplay and a beautiful, but chilling, aesthetic. It's the rare game where we die often but never feel frustrated about it.

10 Pub **Playdead**
Dev **Playdead**

2

Tricks and Treats

Costume Quest

Sure, it's Halloween themed, but the adventure itself is timeless. With candy and monster-smiting in equal measure, this sugary delight is a charming homage to *Final Fantasy X-2*, enhanced by Tim Schafer's humor.

9 Pub **THQ**
Dev **Double Fine**

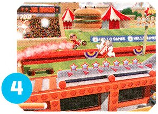
3

Frightening Lightning

inFamous
Festival of Blood

This standalone spinoff sees *inFamous* hero Cole MacGrath facing off against vampires. At stake? [groan] Cole's very own soul. It's enough to make vampires fashionably cool again—in spite of *Twilight*.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Sucker Punch**



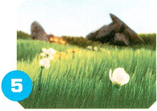
4

Platforming Puzzle Racer

Joe Danger

A mix of *ExciteBike*-style racing and insane stunt-driven platforming action, this vibrant indie gem shines brightly among the best PSN offerings available. Getting wild and dangerous has never been this awesome.

9 Pub **Hello Games**
Dev **Hello Games**



5

Zen Exploration

Flower

This gorgeous concept game makes blowing hordes of fluttering petals around a lush natural environment into an unforgettable experience that holds up against the biggest triple-A offerings. Don't pass this one up.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **thatgamecompany**

6

Puzzle Shooter

PixelJunk Shooter

Featuring alien and rock blasting galore, ihe fourth entry in the *PixelJunk* series is easily the best. Saving trapped mining colonists with a versatile, environmental puzzle-solving ship is a creative and challenging affair that taxes both our mind and our reflexes.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Q-Games**

7

Lettuce Defend Ourselves

Plants vs. Zombies

This ubiquitous tower defense game has made the platform rounds, but there's no denying its insidious charms and eternal goofiness. Hours will be spent meticulously maintaining the grid-like lawn in an attempt to fend off the rampaging waves of groaning, brain-chomping zombies.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **PopCap Games**

8

Role-playing Puzzler

Might & Magic
Clash of Heroes

Don't overlook *Heroes* with its throwback 2D visuals and turn-based battle system—the RPG-flavored puzzle action requires stacking creatures for attacks and building walls for defense. It may look and play old school, but it's still mighty fun and magically challenging.

9 Pub **Ubisoft**
Dev **Capybara Games**

9

Hardcore brawler

Street Fighter III
Third Strike Online

This perfect port of the legendary 1997 arcade game features all new netcode that virtually eliminates lag. *Third Strike's* deep, demanding mechanics have earned it a diehard following. It deserves to be rediscovered and celebrated.

9 Pub **Capcom**
Dev **Capcom/Iron Galaxy**

10

Dolled-Up Adventure

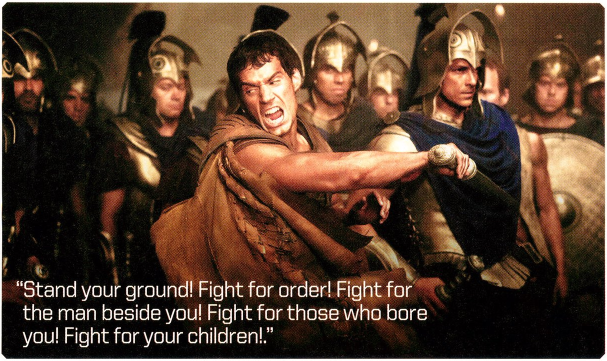
Stacking

Double Fine games come chock full of personality and charm. Using babushka dolls to solve puzzles and explore a '30s Depression-era-esque world of miniature mannequins may not seem all that compelling, but it is. This is a fine argument for Double Fine to make more PSN titles.

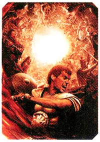
8 Pub **THQ**
Dev **Double Fine**

PSN Video Delivery Service Spotlight

What we're downloading to our PS3 this month



"Stand your ground! Fight for order! Fight for the man beside you! Fight for those who bore you! Fight for your children!."



Immortals

ETA **March 6** Rated **R** Genre **Action/drama** Studio **Relativity Media**

From the producers of *300* comes a riveting tale in which a bunch of dudes with impossibly chiseled six packs fight each other to the death. More accurately, Theseus, a mortal man, is chosen by Zeus to fight against the tyrannical King Hyperion, who seeks a magical artifact that can reawaken the Titans. His plan? To wipe out humanity and challenge the gods themselves. Thankfully Hyperion (played by Mickey Rourke) doesn't stand a chance against the mighty Theseus' well-oiled muscles.

Top VDS Downloads

Movies

- *Contagion*
- *Real Steel*
- *Moneyball*
- *Killer Elite*
- *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*

TV Shows

- *Sons of Anarchy: Season 4*
- *Breaking Bad: Season 4*
- *The Walking Dead: Season 2*
- *The Vampire Diaries: Season 3*
- *Family Guy: Season 10*

BEST FREE STUFF

1

Hog Couture

LittleBigPlanet 2 Groundhog Day costume

If Sackboy sees his shadow, do we have to wait six more weeks for the Groundhog Day costume DLC to arrive? Guess we'll find out.

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Media Molecule**

2

Gas Attack

Resistance 3 The Legacy Grenade

They say a No. 60 Air Fuel Grenade a day keeps the Chimera away. We couldn't resist spicing up our firepower with this vapor-spewing beast.

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Insomniac Games**

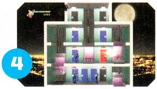
3

The New Black

The Darkness II Official theme

Demon tentacles with fanged maws are the height of fashion these days. We'll never be as cool as mob boss Jackie Estacado, but we can live vicariously through this stylish PS3 theme.

Pub **2K Games**
Dev **Digital Extremes**



4

Flooring It

Elevator Action Deluxe Vaus character

Mixing different genres and gaming eras can be fun, and playing *Elevator Action* as the spaceship paddle from *Arkanoid* is weird but cool.

Pub **Taito**
Dev **Taito/Sync**

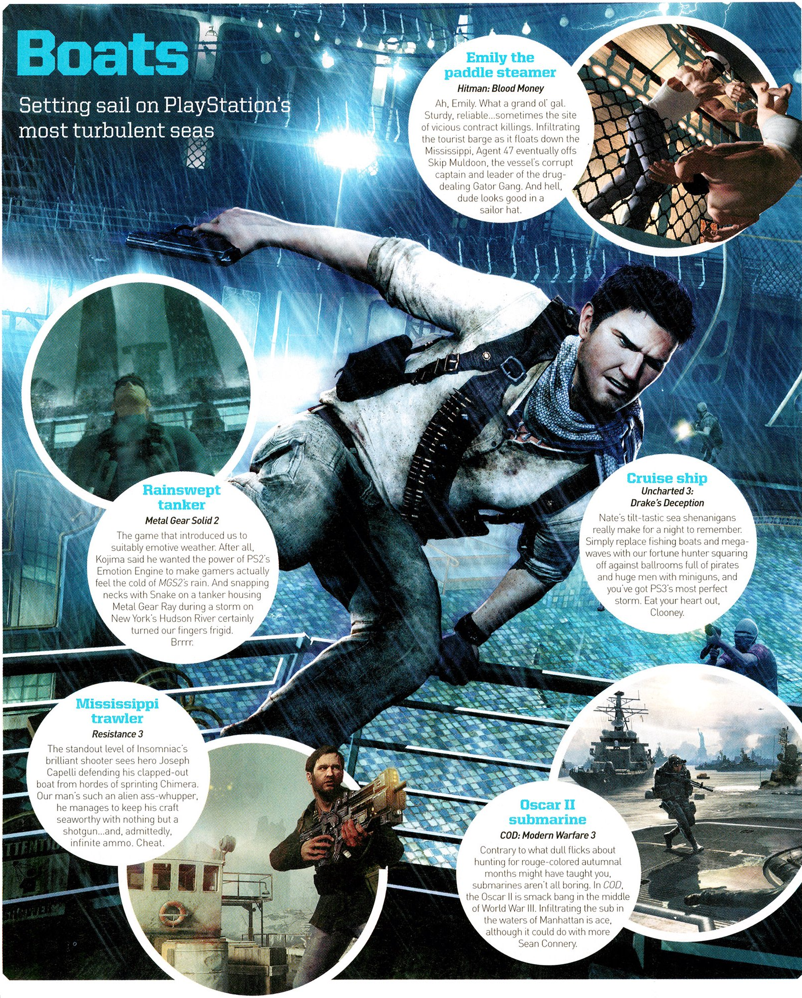
5

Yes We May-hem

Worms 2: Armageddon Mayhem pack

There's some *Ultimate Mayhem* in our *Armageddon*! This DLC adds landscapes, hats, speech banks, and more from *Worms: Ultimate Mayhem*.

Pub **Team17 Software**
Dev **Team17 Software**



Boats

Setting sail on PlayStation's most turbulent seas

Emily the paddle steamer

Hitman: Blood Money

Ah, Emily. What a grand ol' gal. Sturdy, reliable...sometimes the site of vicious contract killings. Infiltrating the tourist barge as it floats down the Mississippi, Agent 47 eventually offs Skip Muldoon, the vessel's corrupt captain and leader of the drug-dealing Gator Gang. And hell, dude looks good in a sailor hat.

Rainswept tanker

Metal Gear Solid 2

The game that introduced us to suitably emotive weather. After all, Kojima said he wanted the power of PS2's Emotion Engine to make gamers actually feel the cold of *MGS2's* rain. And snapping necks with Snake on a tanker housing Metal Gear Ray during a storm on New York's Hudson River certainly turned our fingers frigid. Brrrr.

Cruise ship

Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception

Nate's tilt-tastic sea shenanigans really make for a night to remember. Simply replace fishing boats and mega-waves with our fortune hunter squaring off against ballrooms full of pirates and huge men with miniguns, and you've got PS3's most perfect storm. Eat your heart out, Clooney.

Mississippi trawler

Resistance 3

The standout level of Insomniac's brilliant shooter sees hero Joseph Capelli defending his clapped-out boat from hordes of sprinting Chimera. Our man's such an alien ass-whupper, he manages to keep his craft seaworthy with nothing but a shotgun...and, admittedly, infinite ammo. Cheat.

Oscar II submarine

COD: Modern Warfare 3

Contrary to what dull flicks about hunting for rouge-colored autumnal months might have taught you, submarines aren't all boring. In *COD*, the Oscar II is smack bang in the middle of World War III. Infiltrating the sub in the waters of Manhattan is ace, although it could do with more Sean Connery.

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RETRO GAMER

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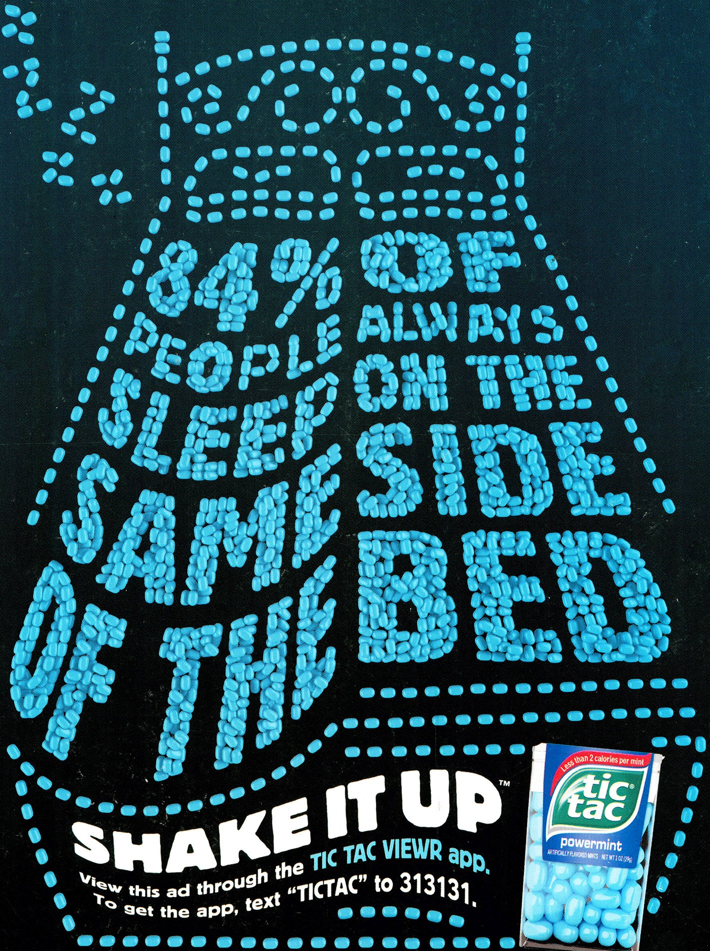
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